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Winter-Spring 1950

The Exiles

The Last Generation

A Rope for Lucifer

Return of the Gods

The Gnuurs Come from the Woodwork Out

Gavagan's Bar

My Astral Body

Postpaid to Paradise

Every Work into Judgment

and stories by MARGARET ST. CLAIR, W. L. ALDEN, DAMON KNIGHT

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ROBERT M. COATES

R. BRETNOR

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP & FLETCHER PRATT

ANTHONY HOPE

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WINTER-SPRING, 1950

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Since its earliest days, and especially since the wonderful contributions of Stanley Weinbaum, one of the greatest joys of science fantasy has been the introduction of Beings unallied to any earthly manifestation of life. We hope to keep you regularly abreast of the latest developments in this imaginative branch of zoölogy; in our first issue we introduced you to harkles, and now we beg you to make the acquaintance of gnurrs. This is not the first significant discovery to be made by R. Bretnor; you may recall his revelations, in "Harper's" some two years ago, concerning that extraordinary explosive element frijolium. Nor is it by any means the last disclosure which we shall bring you from one of the most fertile modern fantasy imaginations. Of the story itself we shall say nothing; it is still not a safe subject to discuss in our offices, since any mention of gnurrs tends to reduce both editors to a quivering state of helplessness which has been authoritatively diagnosed as hysteria bretnorica. We envy you your coming exposure to this attractive and contagious disease.

The Gnurrs Come From the Voodvork Out

by R. BRETNOR

WHEN Papa Schimmelhorn heard about the war with Bobovia, he bought a box-lunch, wrapped his secret weapon in brown paper, and took the first bus straight to Washington. He showed up at the main gate of the Secret Weapons Bureau shortly before midday, complete with box-lunch, beard, and bassoon.

That's right — *bassoon*. He had unwrapped his secret weapon. It looked like a bassoon. The difference didn't show.

Corporal Jerry Collier, on duty at the gate, didn't know there was a difference. All he knew was that the Secret Weapons Bureau was a mock-up, put there to keep the crackpots out of everybody's hair, and that it was a lousy detail, and that there was the whole afternoon to go before his date with Katie.

"Goot morning, soldier boy!" bellowed Papa Schimmelhorn.

Corporal Colliver winked at the two Pfc's who were sunning themselves with him on the guardhouse steps. "Come back Chris'mus, Santa," he said. "We're closed for inventory."

"No!" Papa Schimmelhorn was annoyed. "I cannot stay so long from work. Also, I have here a secret weapon. Let me in!"

The Corporal shrugged. Orders were orders. Crazy or not, you had to let 'em in. He reached back and pressed the loony-button, to alert the psycho's just in case. Then, keys jingling, he walked up to the gate. "A secret weapon, huh?" he said, unlocking it. "Guess you'll have the war all won and over in a week."

"A *week*?" Papa Schimmelhorn roared with laughter. "Soldier boy, you wait! It is over in two days! I am a chenius!"

As he stepped through, Corporal Colliver remembered regulations and asked him sternly if he had any explosives on or about his person.

"Ho-ho-ho! It is not necessary to have explosives to win a war! Zo all right, you search me!"

The corporal searched him. He searched the box-lunch, which contained one deviled egg, two pressed-ham sandwiches, and an apple. He examined the bassoon, shaking it and peering down it to make sure that it was empty.

"Okay, Pop," he said, when he had finished. "You can go on in. But you better leave your flute here."

"It is not a flut," Papa Schimmelhorn corrected him. "It is a *gnurr-pfeife*. And I must take it because it is my secret weapon."

The corporal, who had been looking forward to an hour or so of trying to tootle "Comin' Through The Rye," shrugged philosophically. "Barney," he said to one of the Pfc's, "take this guy to Section Seven."

As the soldier went off with Papa Schimmelhorn in tow, he pressed the loony-button twice more just for luck. "Don't it beat all," he remarked.

Corporal Colliver, of course, didn't know that Papa Schimmelhorn had spoken only gospel truth. He didn't know that Papa Schimmelhorn really was a genius, or that the gnurrs would end the war in two days, or that Papa Schimmelhorn would win it.

At ten minutes past one, Colonel Powhattan Fairfax Pollard was still mercifully unaware of Papa Schimmelhorn's existence.

Colonel Pollard was long and lean and leathery. He wore Peal boots,

spurs, and one of those plum-colored shirts which had been fashionable at Fort Huachuca in the 'twenties. He did not believe in secret weapons. He didn't even believe in atomic bombs and tanks, recoilless rifles and attack aviation. He believed in horses.

The Pentagon had called him back out of retirement to command the Secret Weapons Bureau, and he had been the right man for the job. In the four months of his tenure, only one inventor — a fellow with singularly sound ideas regarding pack-saddles — had been sent on to higher echelons.

Colonel Pollard was seated at his desk, dictating to his blonde WAC secretary from an open copy of Major-General Wardrop's "Modern Pig-sticking." He was accumulating material for a work of his own, to be entitled "Sword and Lance in Future Warfare." Now, in the middle of a quotation outlining the virtues of the Bengal spear, he broke off abruptly. "Miss Hooper!" he announced. "A thought has occurred to me!"

Katie Hooper sniffed. If he had to be formal, why couldn't he just say *sergeant*? Other senior officers had always addressed her as *my dear* or *sweetheart*, at least when they were alone. *Miss Hooper*, indeed! She sniffed again, and said, "Yessir."

Colonel Pollard snorted, apparently to clear his mind. "I can state it as a principle," he began, "that the mania for these so-called scientific weapons is a grave menace to the security of the United States. Flying in the face of the immutable science of war, we are building one unproved weapon after another, counter-weapons against these weapons, counter-counter-weapons, and — and so on. Armed to the teeth with theories and delusions, we soon may stand impotent — Did you hear me, Miss Hooper? *Impotent* —"

Miss Hooper snickered and said, "Yessir."

"— against the onrush of some Attila," shouted the Colonel, "some modern Genghis Khan, as yet unborn, who will sweep away our tinkering technicians like chaff, and carve his empire with cavalry — yes, *cavalry!*"

"Yessir," said his secretary.

"Today," the Colonel thundered, "we have no cavalry! A million mounted moujiks could —"

But the world was not destined to find out just what a million mounted moujiks could or could not do. The door burst open. From the outer office, there came a short, sharp squeal. A plump young officer catapulted across the room, braked to a halt before the Colonel's desk, saluted wildly.

"*Oooh!*" gasped Katie Hooper, staring with vast blue eyes.

The Colonel's face turned suddenly to stone.

And the young officer caught his breath long enough to cry, "My God, it — it's happened, sir!"

Lieutenant Hanson was no combat soldier; he was a scientist. He had made no appointment. He had entered without knocking, in a most unmilitary manner. And — And —

"MISTER!" roared Colonel Pollard. "WHERE ARE YOUR TROUSERS?"

For Lieutenant Hanson obviously was wearing none. Nor was he wearing socks or shoes. And the tattered tails of his shirt barely concealed his shredded shorts.

"SPEAK UP, DAMMIT!"

Vacantly, the Lieutenant glanced at his lower limbs and back again. He began to tremble. "They — they *ate* them!" he blurted. "That's what I'm trying to tell you! Lord knows how he does it! He's about eighty, and he's a — a foreman in a cuckoo-clock factory! But it's the perfect weapon! And it works, it works, *it works!*" He laughed hysterically. "The gnuurrs come from the woodvork out!" he sang, clapping his hands.

Here Colonel Pollard rose from his chair, vaulted his desk, and tried to calm Lieutenant Hanson by shaking him vigorously. "Disgraceful!" he shouted in his ear. "Turn your back!" he ordered the blushing Katie Hooper. "NONSENSE!" he bellowed when the Lieutenant tried to chatter something about gnuurrs.

And, "Vot iss nonsense, soldier boy?" enquired Papa Schimmelhorn from the doorway.

The Lieutenant pointed unsteadily at Colonel Pollard. "Gnuurrs iss nonsense!" he snickered. "*He* says so."

"Ha!" Papa Schimmelhorn glared. "I show you, soldier boy!"

The Colonel erupted. "Soldier boy? SOLDIER BOY? Stand at attention when I speak to you! ATTENTION, DAMN YOU!"

Papa Schimmelhorn, of course, paid no attention whatsoever. He raised his secret weapon to his lips, and the first bars of "Come To The Church In The Wildwood" moaned around the room.

"Mister Hanson!" raged the Colonel. "Arrest that man! Take that thing away from him! I'll prefer charges! I'll —"

At this point, the gnurrs came from the voodvork out.

It isn't easy to describe a gnurr. Can you imagine a mouse-colored, mouse-sized critter shaped like a wild boar, but sort of *shimmery*? With thumbs fore and aft, and a pink, naked tail, and yellow eyes several sizes too large? And with three sets of sharp teeth in its face? You can? Well, that's about it — except that nobody has ever seen *a* gnurr. They don't come that way. When the gnurrs come from the voodvork out, they come *all over* — like lemmings, only more so — millions and millions of them.

And they come eating.

The gnurrs came from the voodvork out just as Papa Schimmelhorn reached ". . . the church in the vale." They covered half the floor, and ate up half the carpet, before he finished "No scene is so dear to my childhood." Then they advanced on Colonel Pollard.

Mounting his desk, the Colonel started slashing around with his riding crop. Katie Hooper climbed a filing case, hoisted her skirt, and screamed. Lieutenant Hanson, secure in his nether nakedness, held his ground and guffawed insubordinately.

Papa Schimmelhorn stopped tootling to shout, "Don'dt worry, soldier boy!" He started in again, playing something quite unrecognizable — something that didn't sound like a tune at all.

Instantly, the gnurrs halted. They looked over their shoulders apprehensively. They swallowed the remains of the Colonel's chair cushion, shimmered brightly, made a queasy sort of creaking sound, and turning tail, vanished into the wainscoting.

Papa Schimmelhorn stared at the Colonel's boots, which were surprisingly intact, and muttered, "Hmm-m, zo!" He leered appreciatively at Katie Hooper, who promptly dropped her skirt. He thumped himself on the chest, and announced, "They are vunderful, my gnurrs!"

"Wh —?" The Colonel showed evidences of profound psychic trauma. "Where did they go?"

"Vere they came from," replied Papa Schimmelhorn.

"Where's that?"

"It iss yesterday!"

"That — that's absurd!" The Colonel stumbled down and fell into his chair. "They weren't here yesterday!"

Papa Schimmelhorn regarded him pityingly. "Of courze nodt! They

vere nodt here yesterday because yesterday vas then today. They *are* here yesterday, ven yesterday iss yesterday already. It iss different."

Colonel Pollard cast an appealing glance at Lieutenant Hanson.

"Perhaps I can explain, sir," said the Lieutenant, whose nervous system seemingly had benefited by the second visit of the gnurrs. "May I make my report?"

"Yes, yes, certainly." Colonel Pollard clutched gladly at the straw.

Lieutenant Hanson pulled up a chair, and — as Papa Schimmelhorn walked over to flirt with Katie — he began to talk in a low and very serious voice.

"It's absolutely incredible," he said. "All the routine tests show that he's at best a high grade moron. He quit school when he was eleven, served his apprenticeship, and worked as a clockmaker till he was in his fifties. After that, he was a janitor in the Geneva Institute of Higher Physics until just a few years ago. Then he came to America and got his present job. But it's the Geneva business that's important. They've been concentrating on extensions of Einstein's and Minkowski's work. He must have overheard a lot of it."

"But if he's a moron —" the Colonel had heard of Einstein, and knew that he was very deep indeed "— what good would it do him?"

"That's just the point, sir! He's a moron on the conscious level, but subconsciously he's a genius. Somehow, part of his mind absorbed the stuff, integrated it, and came up with this bassoon thing. It's got a weird little L-shaped crystal in it, impinging on the reed, and when you blow the crystal vibrates. We don't know why it works — but it sure does!"

"You mean the — uh — the fourth dimension?"

"Precisely. Though we've left yesterday behind, the gnurrs have not. They're there *now*. When a day becomes our yesterday, it becomes their today."

"But — but how does he get rid of them?"

"He says he plays the same tune backwards, and reverses the effect."

Papa Schimmelhorn, who had been encouraging Katie Hooper to feel his biceps, turned around. "You vait!" he laughed uproariously. "Soon, vith my *gnurr-pfeife* I broadcast to the enemy! Ve vin the var!"

The Colonel shied. "The thing's untried, unproven! It — er — requires further study — field service — acid test."

"We haven't time, sir. We'd lose the element of surprise!"

"We will make a regular report through channels," declared the Colonel. "It's a damn' machine, isn't it? They're unreliable. Always have been. It would be contrary to the principles of war."

And then Lieutenant Hanson had an inspiration. "But, sir," he argued, "we won't be fighting with the *gnurr-pfeife!* The gnurrs will be our real weapon, and they're not machines — they're animals! The greatest generals used animals in war! The gnurrs aren't interested in living creatures, but they'll devour just about anything else — wool, cotton, leather, even plastics — and their numbers are simply astronomical. If I were you, I'd get through to the Secretary right away!"

For an instant, the Colonel hesitated — but only for an instant. "Hanson," he said decisively, "you've got a point there — a very sound point!"

And he reached for the telephone.

It took less than twenty-four hours to organize *Operation Gnurr*. The Secretary of Defense, after conferring with the President and the General Staff, personally rushed over to direct preliminary tests of Papa Schimmelhorn's secret weapon. By nightfall, it was known that the gnurrs could:

a. Completely blanket everything within two hundred yards of the *gnurr-pfeife* in less than twenty seconds,

b. Strip an entire company of infantry, supported by chemical weapons, to the skin in one minute and eighteen seconds,

c. Ingest the contents of five Quartermaster warehouses in just over two and a half minutes,

and,

d. Come from the voodvork out when the *gnurr-pfeife* was played over a carefully shielded short-wave system.

It had also become apparent that there were only three effective ways to kill a gnurr — by shooting him to death, drenching him with liquid fire, or dropping an atomic bomb on him — and that there were entirely too many gnurrs for any of these methods to be worth a hoot.

By morning, Colonel Powhattan Fairfax Pollard — because he was the only senior officer who had ever seen a gnurr, and because animals were known to be right up his alley — had been made a lieutenant-general and given command of the operation. Lieutenant Hanson, as his aide, had

suddenly found himself a major. Corporal Colliver had become a master-sergeant, presumably for being there when the manna fell. And Katie Hooper had had a brief but strenuous date with Papa Schimmelhorn.

Nobody was satisfied. Katie complained that Papa Schimmelhorn and his gnuurs had the same idea in mind, only his technique was different. Jerry Colliver, who had been dating Katie regularly, griped that the old buzzard with the muscles had sent his Hooper rating down to zero. Major Hanson had awakened to the possibility of somebody besides the enemy tuning in on the Papa Schimmelhorn Hour.

Even General Pollard was distressed —

"I could overlook everything, Hanson," he said sourly, "except his calling me 'soldier boy.' I won't stand for it! The science of war cannot tolerate indiscipline. I spoke to him about it, and all he said was, 'It iss all right, soldier boy. You can call me Papa.' "

Major Hanson disciplined his face, and said, "Well, why not call him Papa, sir? After all, it's just such human touches as these that make history."

"Ah, yes — History." The General paused reflectively. "Hmm, perhaps so, perhaps so. They always called Napoleon 'the little Corporal'."

"The thing that really bothers me, General, is how we're going to get through without our own people listening in. I guess they must've worked out something on it, or they wouldn't have scheduled the — the offensive for five o'clock. That's only four hours off."

"Now that you mention it," said General Pollard, coming out of his reverie, "a memorandum did come through — Oh, Miss Hooper, bring me that memo from G-1, will you? — Thank you. Here it is. It seems that they have decided to — er — scramble the broadcast."

"*Scramble* it, sir?"

"Yes, yes. And I've issued operational orders accordingly. You see, Intelligence reported several weeks ago that the enemy knows how to unscramble anything we transmit that way. When Mr. — ah, 'Papa' Schimmelhorn goes on the air, we will scramble him, but we will not transmit the code key to our own people. It is assumed that from five to fifteen enemy monitors will hear him. His playing of the tune will constitute Phase One. When it is over, the microphones will be switched off, and he will play it backwards. That will be Phase Two, to dispose of such gnuurs as appear locally."

"Seems sound enough." Major Hanson frowned. "And it's pretty smart, if everything goes right. But what if it doesn't? Hadn't we better have an ace up our sleeve?"

He frowned again. Then, as the General didn't seem to have any ideas on the subject, he went about his duties. He made a final inspection of the special sound-proof room in which Papa Schimmelhorn would tootle. He allocated its observation windows — one to the President, the Secretary, and General Pollard; one to the Chief of Staff, with his sea and air counterparts; another to Intelligence liaison; and the last to the functioning staff of Operation Gnurr, himself included. At ten minutes to five, when everything was ready, he was still worrying.

"Look here," he whispered to Papa Schimmelhorn, as he escorted him to the fateful door. "What are we going to do if your gnurrs really get loose here? You couldn't play them back into the voodvork in a month of Sundays!"

"Don'dt worry, soldier boy!" Papa Schimmelhorn gave him a resounding slap on the back. "I haff yet vun trick I do nodt tell you!"

And with that vague assurance, he closed the door behind him.

"Ready?" called General Pollard tensely, at one minute to five.

"Ready!" echoed Sergeant Colliver.

The tension mounted. The seconds ticked away. The General's hand reached for a sabre-hilt that wasn't there. At five exactly —

"CHARGE!" the General cried.

A red light flared above the microphones.

And Papa Schimmelhorn started tootling "Come To The Church In The Wildwood."

The gnurrs, of course, came from the voodvork out.

The gnurrs came from the voodvork out, and a hungry gleam was in their yellow eyes. They carpeted the floor. They started piling up. They surged against the massive legs of Papa Schimmelhorn, their tiny electric-razor sets of teeth going like all get out. His trousers vanished underneath the flood — his checkered coat, his tie, his collar, the fringes of his beard. And Papa Schimmelhorn, all undismayed, lifted his big bassoon out of gnurrs' way and tootled on. "Come, come, come, come. Come to the church in the vildwood . . ."

Of course, Major Hanson couldn't hear the *gnurr-pfeife* — but he had sung the song in Sunday school, and now the words resounded in his brain. Verse after verse, chorus after chorus — The awful thought struck him that Papa Schimmelhorn would be overwhelmed, sucked under, drowned in gnurrs . . .

And then he heard the voice of General Pollard, no longer steady — "R-ready, Phase Two?"

"R-ready!" replied Sergeant Colliver.

A green light flashed in front of Papa Schimmelhorn.

For a moment, nothing changed. Then the gnurrs hesitated. Apprehensively, they glanced over their hairy shoulders. They shimmered. They started to recede. Back, back, back they flowed, leaving Papa Schimmelhorn alone, triumphant, and naked as a jay-bird.

The door was opened, and he emerged — to be congratulated and re-clothed, and (much to Sergeant Colliver's annoyance) to turn down a White House dinner invitation in favor of a date with Katie. The active phases of Operation Gnurr were over.

In far-away Bobovia, however, chaos reigned. Later it was learned that eleven inquisitive enemy monitors had unscrambled the tootle of the *gnurr-pfeife*, and that tidal waves of gnurrs had inundated the enemy's eleven major cities. By seven-fifteen, except for a few hysterical outlying stations, Bobovia was off the air. By eight, Bobovian military activity had ceased in every theatre. At twenty after ten, an astounded Press learned that the surrender of Bobovia could be expected momentarily . . . The President had received a message from the Bobovian Marshalissimo, asking permission to fly to Washington with his Chief of Staff, the members of his Cabinet, and several relatives. And would His Excellency the President — the Marshalissimo had radioed — be so good as to have someone meet them at the airport with nineteen pairs of American trousers, new or used?

VE Day wasn't in it. Neither was VJ Day. As soon as the papers hit the streets — BOBOVIA SURRENDERS! — ATOMIC MICE DEVOUR ENEMY! — SWISS GENIUS' STRATEGY WINS WAR! — the crowds went wild. From Maine to Florida, from California to Cape Cod, the lights went on, sirens and bells and auto horns resounded through the night, millions of throats were hoarse from singing "Come To The Church In The Wildwood."

Next day, after massed television cameras had let the entire nation in on the formal signing of the surrender pact, General Pollard and Papa Schimmelhorn were honored at an impressive public ceremony.

Papa Schimmelhorn received a vote of thanks from both Houses of Congress. He was awarded academic honors by Harvard, Princeton, M.I.T., and a number of denominational colleges down in Texas. He spoke briefly about cuckoo-clocks, the gnurrs, and Katie Hooper.

General Pollard, having been presented with a variety of domestic and foreign decorations, spoke at some length on the use of animals in future warfare. He pointed out that the horse, of all animals, was best suited to normal military purposes, and he discussed in detail many of the battles and campaigns in which it had been tried and proven. He was just starting in on swords and lances when the abrupt arrival of Major Hanson cut short the whole affair.

Hanson raced up with sirens screaming. He left his escort of MP's and ran across the platform. Pale and panting, he reached the President — and, though he tried to whisper, his voice was loud enough to reach the General's ear. "*The — the gnurrs!*" he choked. "*They're in Los Angeles!*"

Instantly, the General rose to the occasion. "Attention, please!" he shouted at the microphones. "This ceremony is now over. You may consider yourselves — er — ah — DISMISSED!"

Before his audience could react, he had joined the knot of men around the President, and Hanson was briefing them on what had happened. "It was a research unit! They'd worked out a descrambler — new stuff — better than the enemy's. They didn't know. Tried it out on Papa here. Cut a record. Played it back today! Los Angeles is overrun!"

There were long seconds of despairing silence. Then, "Gentlemen," said the President quietly, "we're in the same boat as Bobovia."

The General groaned.

But Papa Schimmelhorn, to everyone's surprise, laughed boisterously. "Oh-ho-ho-ho! Don't worry, soldier boy! You trust old Papa Schimmelhorn. All ofer, in Bobovia, iss gnurrs! Ve haff them only in Los Angeles, vere it does nodt matter! Also, I haff a trick I did nodt tell!" He winked a cunning wink. "Iss vun thing frightens gnurrs —"

"In God's name — *what?*" exclaimed the Secretary.

"Horzes," said Papa Schimmelhorn. "It iss the smell."

"Horses? Did you say *horses?*?" The General pawed the ground. His eyes flashed fire. "CAVALRY!" he thundered. "We must have CAVALRY!"

No time was wasted. Within the hour, Lieutenant-General Powhattan Fairfax Pollard, the only senior cavalry officer who knew anything about gnurrs, was promoted to the rank of General of the Armies, and given supreme command. Major Hanson became a brigadier, a change of status which left him slightly dazed. Sergeant Colliver received his warrant.

General Pollard took immediate and decisive action. The entire Air Force budget for the year was commandeered. Anything even remotely resembling a horse, saddle, bridle, or bale of hay was shipped westward in requisitioned trains and trucks. Former cavalry officers and non-com's, ordered to instant duty regardless of age and wear-and-tear, were flown by disgruntled pilots to assembly points in Oregon, Nevada, and Arizona. Anybody and everybody who had ever so much as seen a horse was drafted into service. Mexico sent over several regiments on a lend-lease basis.

The Press had a field day. NUDE HOLLYWOOD STARS FIGHT GNURRS! headlined many a full front page of photographs. *Life* devoted a special issue to General of the Armies Pollard, Jeb Stuart, Marshal Ney, Belisarius, the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava, and AR 50-45, School Of The Soldier Mounted Without Arms. The *Journal-American* reported, on reliable authority, that the ghost of General Custer had been observed entering the Officers' Club at Fort Riley, Kansas.

On the sixth day, General Pollard had ready in the field the largest cavalry force in all recorded history. Its discipline and appearance left much to be desired. Its horsemanship was, to say the very least, uneven. Still, its morale was high, and —

"Never again," declared the General to correspondents who interviewed him at his headquarters in Phoenix, "must we let politicians and long-haired theorists persuade us to abandon the time-tried principles of war, and trust our national destiny to — to *gadgets*."

Drawing his sabre, the General indicated his operations map. "Our strategy is simple," he announced. "The gnurr forces have by-passed the Mohave Desert in the south, and are invading Arizona. In Nevada, they have concentrated against Reno and Virginia City. Their main offensive, however, appears to be aimed at the Oregon border. As you know, I have

more than two million mounted men at my disposal — some three hundred divisions. In one hour, they will move forward. We will force the gnurrs to retreat in three main groups — in the south, in the center, in the north. Then, when the terrain they hold has been sufficiently restricted, Papa — er, that is, Mister — Schimmelhorn will play his instrument over mobile public address systems."

With that, the General indicated that the interview was at an end, and, mounting a splendid bay gelding presented to him by the citizens of Louisville, rode off to emplane for the theatre of operations.

Needless to say, his conduct of the War Against The Gnurrs showed the highest degree of initiative and energy, and a perfect grasp of the immutable principles of strategy and tactics. Even though certain envious elements in the Pentagon afterwards referred to the campaign as "Polly's Round-up," the fact remained that he was able to achieve total victory in five weeks — months before Bobovia even thought of promising its Five Year Plan for re-trousering its population. Inexorably, the terror-stricken gnurrs were driven back. Their queasy creaking could be heard for miles. At night, their shimmering lighted up the sky. In the south, where their deployment had been confined by deserts, three tootlings in reverse sufficed to bring about their downfall. In the center, where the action was heavier than anticipated, seventeen were needed. In the north, a dozen were required to do the trick. In each instance, the sound was carried over an area of several hundred square miles by huge loudspeaker units mounted in escort wagons or carried in pack. Innumerable cases of personal heroism were recorded — and Jerry Colliver, after having four pairs of breeches shot out from under him, was personally commissioned in the field by General Pollard.

Naturally, a few gnurrs made their escape — but the felines of the state, who had been mewing with frustration, made short work of them. As for the numerous gay instances of indiscipline which occurred as the victorious troops passed through the quite literally denuded towns, these were soon forgiven and forgotten by the joyous populace.

Secretly, to avoid the rough enthusiasm of admiring throngs, General Pollard and Papa Schimmelhorn flew back to Washington — and three full regiments with drawn sabres were needed to clear a way for them. Finally, though, they reached the Pentagon. They walked toward the General's

office arm in arm, and then at the door they paused for a moment or two.

"Papa," said General Pollard, pointing at the *gnurr-pfeife* with awe, "we have made History! And, by God, we'll make more of it!"

"*Ja!*" said Papa Schimmelhorn, with an enormous wink. "But tonight, soldier boy, ve vill make whoopee! I haff a date with Katie. For you she has a girl friend."

General Pollard hesitated. "Wouldn't it — wouldn't it be bad for — er — discipline?"

"Don'dt worry, soldier boy! Ve don'dt tell anybody!" laughed Papa Schimmelhorn — and threw the door open.

There stood the General's desk. There, at its side, stood Brigadier-General Hanson, looking worried. Against one wall stood Lieutenant Jerry Colliver, smirking loathsomey, with a possessive arm around Katie Hooper's waist. And in the General's chair sat a very stiff old lady, in a very stiff black dress, tapping a very stiff umbrella on the blotting pad.

As soon as she saw Papa Schimmelhorn, she stopped tapping and pointed the umbrella at him. "*So!*" she hissed. "You think you get avay? To spoil Cousin Anton's beaudtiful bassoon, and play vith mice, and passes at female soldier-girls make?"

She turned to Katie Hooper, and they exchanged a feminine glance of triumph and understanding. "Iss lucky that you phone, so I find out," she said. "You are nice girl. You can see under sheep's clothings."

She rose. As Katie blushed, she strode across the room, and grabbed the *gnurr-pfeife* from Papa Schimmelhorn. Before anyone could stop her, she stripped it of its reed — and ground the L-shaped crystal underfoot. "Now," she exclaimed, "iss no more gnurrs and people-without-trousers-monkeyshines!"

While General Pollard stared in blank amazement and Jerry Colliver snickered gloatingly, she took poor Papa Schimmelhorn firmly by the ear. "So ve go home!" she ordered, steering him for the door. "Vere iss no soldier girls, and the house needs painting!"

Looking crestfallen, Papa Schimmelhorn went without resistance. "Gootbye!" he called unhappily. "I must go home vith Mama."

But as he passed by General Pollard, he winked his usual wink. "Don'dt worry, soldier boy!" he whispered. "I get avay again — I am a chenius!"

American fantastic fiction has gone in two directions from its very beginnings — that of Poe, who set his horrors in suitably desolate Gothic settings, and that of Fitz-James O'Brien, who put his impossible intrusions plump in the middle of the most detailed every-day naturalism. We confess a belief, as editors, that the O'Brien path leads to far stronger conviction, to a why-this-could-happen-to-me! immediacy; and for that reason hold that some of the best modern fantasy is that infrequently published by the suavely realistic "New Yorker." Robert M. Coates, that magazine's art critic, is widely known for his terrifying fiction of the psychologically horrible, such as the recent WISTERIA COTTAGE and some of the short stories in ALL THE YEAR ROUND. How deftly he can handle a lighter vein, and how convincing he can make the appearances of the elder deities in such familiar locales as Danbury and Penn Yan, he demonstrates in this story from "The New Yorker" of December 11, 1948 — and even in this lighter mood, not without a touch of impending terror.

The Return of the Gods

by ROBERT M. COATES

THERE SEEMS to be no question but that something decidedly out of the ordinary happened to Ralph Everett, and the explanation that he gave only served to heighten the mystery. Indeed, it was not until some months later, and after a number of other incidents similar to his own experience had occurred, that his story assumed any credibility at all, and even then the incidents themselves were so widely scattered and so obscure in their implications that very little serious attention was paid to them.

At all events, in Ralph Everett's case the known facts are, briefly, these: He had gone out to Jones Beach for the day with a party of friends — three girls and two men, all of them, like Everett himself, in their early twenties, and all residents of the Ozone Park section of Queens — and he was swim-

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ming with two members of the group, Bessie Martin and Harold Lotz, when, abruptly, he disappeared. It was early of a sunny Saturday afternoon in July; the sea, except for a gentle swell that broke harmlessly as the water shallowed, was calm. But both the beach and the waters close inshore were swarming with people, and the three, with Everett some yards in the lead, had swum out to the fringes of the crowd when the accident, if such it may be called, happened.

Both the men were fairly strong swimmers — Ralph himself, a Navy destroyer man during the war, had survived being washed overboard in the South Pacific — but Miss Martin was less confident, and it appears that once they had left the more populous waters, she decided that she had best turn back, and Lotz, treading water for an instant, raised his head to shout the news to Everett. It was then that he noticed that his friend was no longer visible.

As Lotz expressed it later, "one minute he was there and the next minute he wasn't," and at first he suspected that some practical joke was afoot, for there had been a good deal of horseplay among the group during the day. Some moments were lost while Lotz and Miss Martin waited cautiously, on their guard against whatever underwater onslaught Everett might be preparing for them. No such onslaught occurred, however, and Lotz, worried now, swam out a little way to investigate. He even dived a few times, gingerly, but without result, and in the end — Miss Martin, much perturbed, had already started in — he was forced to swim in to shore and report the disappearance to a lifeguard.

It was fully two hours before Ralph Everett was seen again, and in the meantime all the lifesaving facilities the beach could offer had been brought into action. A rowboat search having failed, a motor launch with a dragnet was called in, and when this, too, turned up no trace of the vanished swimmer, the air patrol was alerted; from then on, to the fascination of the other bathers, Coast Guard planes dipped and swooped along the beach while a helicopter from the same command, its rotors clattering in the sunny air, moved methodically back and forth above the water just offshore.

In spite of all this purposeful activity, it was Miss Martin who saw Ralph Everett first. By that time, the little group of which Everett had been a member had begun to disintegrate. One young lady, Miss Evelyn Felling,

had become so unnerved that she had had to go home, with one of the young men as an escort, and another girl, Gladys Casey, discouraged, had gone in to the bathhouse to dress. Miss Martin and Lotz were standing dispiritedly on the beach when the former cried suddenly, "There he is! There's Ralph!"

There, indeed, he was. Still in bathing trunks, he was walking through the crowd as if looking for someone. He seemed dazed and worried, and his eyes lit up with obvious pleasure when Harold Lotz ran up to him.

"Hello, Harry!" he cried before the other could speak. "Gee, I'm glad to see you. D'ja get in all right?"

"Did *I* get in all right?" said Lotz, astonished. "Listen, Ralph, what the hell are you talking about? Where you been?"

But Everett went on as if he had hardly heard. "Yeah. I mean you and Bessie. I was worried, you know. I thought maybe they'd got you, too."

"Got *us*?" Lotz again repeated. "What you talking about, anyway? Who'd get us?"

For the first time, Everett seemed to hesitate. "Well—" he said, and glanced oddly at Lotz. "Well — the mermaids," he said, and then, noticing his friend's expression, he threw back his head defiantly. "Yes, the mermaids, damn it! The same mermaids that got hold of me."

Everett later was the subject of considerable interest to the psychiatrists at Queens General Hospital and Bellevue, where he was taken, successively, for observation, and, later still, though more whimsically, to his friends around Ozone Park. In the end, faced with disbelief, clinical or ironic, on all sides, he abandoned his original story completely and "admitted" that it had all been a fabrication. Until then, though, his accounts of what had happened to him were substantially as follows:

He had been swimming along when suddenly a cold arm brushed against his and he felt a powerful disturbance in the water beneath him. Looking down through the greenish dimness, he had had just time to glimpse a blond, white-skinned girl, or the upper half of her, quite nude, swimming easily on her back a few feet below. "She was looking right up at me and smiling," he told Lotz dreamily. "Like a girl that was ready for a pickup, sort of. Only, it was funny, out there in the water. Except that even then — I don't know, even then I could tell she belonged there."

As he told it, things, after that, happened fast. He made some move,

possibly of escape — he didn't remember. But on the instant, and with a swiftness and ease that astonished him, she glided up to him, seized him, and, quite simply, swam off with him. There was, it seemed, no possibility of resistance. She swam down, down, down, at first, till the light from above disappeared almost entirely, and then out, or somewhere; in the horizonless water he had soon lost all sense of direction. "And, I don't know, it was like she was showing off, or something. She kept darting me this way and that, and spinning, and spiralling. Boy! Could that mermaid swim!" By that time, he had noticed her tail.

"You had no difficulty in breathing, I take it?" inquired one of the psychiatrists, a Dr. Pritzen, when Ralph told his story at the hospital, and Ralph looked at the man with disarming candor.

"No, you know, I didn't!" he exclaimed innocently. "I never thought of that till now, either. But I didn't. Do you suppose it was just because I didn't think of it, or something? What do you think, Doc? Could that be possible?"

Dr. Pritzen stared at him for a moment, and coughed. "I rather doubt it," he said. "But go on with what you were telling us."

There was, it seemed, not a great deal more to tell — though there might have been more if the consistent incredulity that Ralph encountered hadn't led him to curtail the latter part of his recital. They swam down, and out, and then down again; they were skimming what seemed to be the ocean floor when, at last, they came to the cave.

"The cave?" Someone — first, among the doctors who examined him, and then among his friends — was sure to ask the question.

"Yes, damn it, the cave!" Ralph finally took to saying. "I know you probably don't believe me, and those doctors didn't either, so with them I just decided to shut up about it. But just the same there was a cave there, somewhere, and full of — well, what anyway looked like diamonds. And she swam me right into it. There was maybe a dozen other mermaids, just sitting around there, only they paid no attention to us. And my mermaid, she took me right over to a corner and we sat there. I didn't like it."

"No?" the friends would ask soberly, saving their mirth for later.

"No, I didn't. You can talk about these mermaids all you want to, and I must say this one had a good build, too — what there was of it. But her face — well, it was sort of broad and flat and — well, fishy. Like a cod's, if you

get what I mean, only prettier. And cold! Boy! Was that gal's skin cold! You know that girl they had out at the World's Fair years ago, the one they froze in the block of ice? Well, I bet this gal's skin was as cold as that one's. I bet if you touched them, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference."

"Well, what happened?"

"Well, hell, didn't I tell you? She wanted me to stay."

"Well, then, how did you get away?"

"Well, I told her. I just told her my interests was elsewhere. And you know how it is when a gal gets sore at you. When we came back, we came back fast! Funny thing, though," he used to add. (This was before he had abandoned all efforts to make anyone believe anything.) "She knew all about me. About the Navy, anyway, and that time when I got washed overboard. I don't know, it seemed like she was interested in me from way back."

All the notice that the Ralph Everett episode got was a few minor items in the New York and Long Island newspapers, under some such heading as the *World-Telegram's* "Jones Beach Bather, Hunting Mermaids, Ires Lifeguards Hunting Him" and all of them more or less discreetly suggesting that he was drunk — a belief that, incidentally, the hospital psychiatrists eventually came to concur in.

Other episodes got, on the whole, even less attention. A truck driver named Eddie Gallatin, later in that month, was making the night run from Newark to Scranton, Pennsylvania, when he was astonished to see, as he came up Route 46 on his way to the Water Gap, a man dressed in what looked like white kilts and a silver derby coming out of the woods at the side of the road just ahead of him. The apparition, understandably, aroused his interest.

"I slowed down, d'you see," he said. He was sitting at the counter of an all-night diner in Stroudsburg, much frequented by truckmen, where he had stopped to get his wits together after the incident. "I slowed down and, you know, he was on the wrong side of the road to me. As I passed, I leaned out a bit to give the lad the once-over. And, with that, I'll be damned if he didn't jump right up onto the running board, looking in at me. And me travelling — well, maybe thirty-five or forty at the time. I can tell you, it was surprising. But that was nothing, at that, to what come later."

Eddie took a sip from the cup of coffee before him while the other drivers stared at him intently.

"Well, you know, I'm as strict as any about no riders, and by rights I should have ordered him off right there. But I didn't, and for that reason I'd be obliged if the rest of you would say as little as possible about this. 'Where you headed for?' he says, with a kind of sly grin, and I told him Scranton. 'What's the kilts for?' I asked. 'And that hat? You know, you look like a clown?'

"'Oh, I am. I am,' says he, laughing a little. He was a great one, all through, for not answering questions. He asked them. And then, before I knew it, he had whisked into the cab and was sitting right there beside me. 'Where you from?' he says next, and from then on it was question, question, question — the job, the wife, the pay, everything. But you ain't heard the end of it yet." He took another sip of his coffee. "I did get the name out of him, though, though it mayn't have been the real one. 'Call me Mercury,' he said when I asked him. 'Mr. Ford's Mercury?' says I. 'Mr. Jupiter's,' he says, and he burst out laughing.

"But, you know, I was getting a little tired of him and his questions, and I could see that he knew it — I felt it. 'You're a smart one, aren't you?' he says, and he wasn't grinning at me the same way he was before. 'I can take care of myself, I guess,' says I back to him. 'Like you did in the Marianas?' he says, and, you know, that surprised me.

"'How'd you know I was out there?' I says, but he just laughed and laughed. He was a smart-looking fella, for all his queer getup, and although he was small, he was wiry. 'Oh, I know. I know,' he says. 'Oh, the Seabees! The fighting Seabees! And the next one?' he said to me suddenly. 'Can you take care of yourself in the next one?'

"'I sure can, if one comes,' I said, quick, and now here comes the part — well, I must say if you don't believe it, I can hardly blame you. But it happened. He just sat there for a minute, looking at me. 'Don't you know?' he said, soft. And then, 'Well, then, maybe you can, Edward Gallatin. Maybe you can. I thought I could help you,' he says. 'But perhaps —' And then, quick as a wink, he was out of the cab and down running on the road again. And here, now, may God help me, it's true, but I was going along maybe forty or forty-five, and he looked back at me once and he waved and then — whoosh! Like a racing car putting on speed, he was gone up the road."

"‘Whoosh?’” said one of the drivers gravely.

“Yes, ‘whoosh,’ damn you, Tom Cleary, and I can tell from your looks that you don’t believe it. But it happened, by God! It happened. And the one thing that sticks with me, how did he know my name?”

A young farmer, fishing up one of the streams off the Wesserunsett River, below Athens, Maine, was accosted by a young lady who suddenly appeared among the trees, so pretty, so scantily clad, and so boldly flirtatious in her manner that he figured she must be one of the actresses from the summer theatre at Skowhegan, down the line. Being married, and a devout Congregationalist to boot, he would have none of her, but a friend of his, a young ne’er-do-well named Rob Whittlesey, to whom he told the story, went out early next morning to fish the same stream and was never heard from again.

There were a number of unexplained disappearances that summer, and in the fall, after the hunting season started, there were even more of them. It is likely, too, that a good many others went unrecorded. A garbled version of the case of the Whittlesey youth got a notice in the Bangor *Intelligencer*. But the mounting pressures of international events, with their graver and more massive menaces, made the loss of a single individual seem of small importance, and it was only the most unusual instances that got anything more than the narrowest local attention.

Such a one, though in this case no missing persons were involved, was the curious incident that occurred at the opening of the garden-vegetables exhibit at the Danbury Fair, when a fairly large body of spectators stood ready to swear that as Mr. Arthur B. Gerber, of the Danbury 4-H Club, made some reference to the Goddess Ceres in his opening address, the Goddess herself appeared beside him for an instant on the platform.

“He said something about wishing that Ceres was with us,” Mrs. Asa J. Burgess, of Brookfield Center, told a reporter later, “and no sooner had he spoken than, my goodness, there she was! She looked real nice, too, kind of rosy and plump and cheerful. She looked something like Eleanor Roosevelt, only not so — well, Democratic, and the only thing out of the way with her was the dress she had on, which was white, and all folded and loose and just wrapped around her. You could see she hadn’t anything on underneath it at all. We all saw her. We all gave a sort of gasp, you know, and I guess it was that that startled her. Anyway, she looked startled and kind of embarrassed, like a person that has got into the wrong room, or

something, by mistake. Then she backed away a step or two, and then — just like that — she vanished! I told my husband about it, and he thought at first I must have been dreaming. But he changed his tune later on, when he heard all the others talking about it. We all talked about it afterward. We all saw her."

This case, incidentally, was the first one involving more than one witness, and though a good many editors strongly suspected it to be no more than a cleverly devised publicity stunt to advertise the Fair, it was duly reported, not only in Eastern papers but throughout the country. It was followed a few weeks later by an item from upstate New York, first appearing in the Rochester *Democrat & Chronicle*, in which members of the First Baptist Church at Penn Yan, while picnicking on the shores of nearby Seneca Lake, were reported to have been disturbed by what appeared to be fauns.

Not all the details of this last affair were clear, for the confusion caused by the irruption was apparently tremendous, and the conduct of the invaders toward certain ladies of the party seems to have been such as to dictate discretion in the recital. But the fact that again a large number of presumably responsible persons were willing to swear to the truth of so wildly improbable an occurrence was enough to excite more than passing interest. Obviously, something unusual in the way of either physical or psychic phenomena was afoot, and the result was, on the one hand, to set a number of research students in the field of mass psychology busily to work writing treatises for the scientific journals and, on the other, to give rise to an even greater number of sometimes whimsical magazine and newspaper articles on the same events.

One of these, which appeared in the Sunday magazine section of the New York *Herald Tribune*, is of interest to us here, since at one point it oddly foreshadowed the experiences, something like a month later, of one Ensign Alfred J. Smalley, U.S.N.

"Ye Gods and Subconscious Wishes" was the article's rather desperately punning title, and beneath its humorous approach the author seemed to subscribe to the general theory that the manifestations witnessed by large numbers of witnesses could be explained by mass hypnosis, like the Indian rope trick or the "flying discs" scare of the mid-nineteen-forties, only these later phenomena were on a broader scale, and complicated by the world's ever-growing fears for its future. "That, at least, is what the psychologists

would say," he remarked at one point, "and who are we to disagree with them? 'People just want to get away from it all,' they might add. (It's hard to stop these psychologists, once they get started.) 'And they turn to the Gods to help them do it.' But just because I'm a born disagreeer, here I come with another theory. Men need Gods, to be sure, but has it ever occurred to you that Gods also need men? Just as any pretty blonde walking down the street needs a truck driver or two to whistle at her, so Venus would hardly be Venus if no mortals were left to admire her. Where would Jove be, with all his thunderbolts, without a few men to aim them at? It strikes me that if *we're* worried, maybe the Gods are, too!" And he ended, "If that's the case, Venus, and it's a man you want, please look no longer. Just be at the corner of Broadway and Fortieth at eight tonight. I'll be waiting." It was slightly over three weeks later that the Ensign Smalley already referred to met — or at least said he met — Venus herself.

Here, again, the circumstances were peculiar. Smalley, who was taking a course in carrier-based-plane techniques at the Naval Air Station at Quonset Point, Rhode Island, set out early one morning with two other planes on a routine navigational flight. Some forty-five minutes after the takeoff, when the group was on the second leg of its flight, his plane suddenly fell off into a spin and, still spinning, crashed in a field about a mile and a half north of Guilford, Connecticut. The plane, oddly enough, did not burn, though it was pretty thoroughly demolished, and since no trace of Smalley's body was found in the wreckage, a search was instituted for his remains.

The search was still under way when, some six hours later, to the intense surprise of some half-dozen onlookers, Smalley parachuted gently to earth on the grounds of a golf course near Taunton, Massachusetts; what lent mystery to the affair was the fact that no plane, or any sound of one, had been noticed at the time. But the officers who examined him, on the old-established military theory that anything unusual is, in itself, dangerous, tended to treat him all the more harshly for that, and Ensign Smalley got a fairly rough going over before his case was finally disposed of. His own story, of course — that he had been wafted from his plane in mid-flight and had spent the rest of the time in a cave in the clouds with Venus — was dismissed as an impertinent fabrication.

Meantime, Smalley himself insisted that all he wanted to do was resign from the Navy.

"That's the only thing I came back for, damn it," he protested to the advocate assigned to defend him, just before his court-martial. "Can't they let me resign?"

"You'll resign yourself right into Portsmouth if you don't change your story," replied the officer.

"But it's true! Damn it, I tell you it's true!"

"About the clouds, and the angels, and all that?"

"Yes. All that. Only, they weren't angels. As I told you before, they were nymphs, or something. And the clouds weren't like real clouds, either." Ensign Smalley was a personable youth of about twenty-three, with a good service record until this incident, and his face always got rhapsodic at this point. "Or they were clouds, I guess, except that they were all shiny and glistening. Like mother-of-pearl, if you know what I mean. And the floor of the place — well, I mean it was cloud, too, probably, but you could walk on it."

The advocate glanced at his notes. "You had no difficulty breathing?" he asked suddenly.

"Breathing?" Smalley repeated.

"Yes, breathing. You said they took you up pretty high. Didn't you feel the need of oxygen?"

Smalley stared at the man for a moment. "Oxygen!" he repeated. "Listen, man, can't you get it through your head that this was supernatural? Didn't I tell you it was Venus I talked to? And here you talk about oxygen!"

"The court is likely to talk about it, too."

"Let them talk."

"And the loss of a perfectly good forty thousand dollars' worth of airplane."

"Sure. I know. It's too bad about the plane. But, still —"

Venus had been wonderful, Smalley said, though a bit unpredictable. In her way of talking, she had alternated between a sort of stilted classical diction and that of a somewhat etherealized Mae West. But there had been no question about her beauty. When he had first landed in the cave, she had not been there, and he had been taken in charge, so to speak, by some four or five playful nymphs; his first knowledge of her arrival had been when one of them cried to him suddenly, "Bow down, the Queen enters! Bow down!"

All the others bowed down. Smalley, conscious of his uniform and its obligation, had at first determined to hold himself staunchly erect, offering, if anything, a salute. But when, turning, he saw her before him, snowy-browed, damask-cheeked, azure-eyed, he could feel his strength melting within him, and when she smiled at him — actually smiled at him — he was brought almost literally to his knees.

"This, then, is the young man you brought us, Nicandia?" she asked, and the nymph who had told him to bow down answered, "Yes." Venus put out her hand and took his and — for a moment, Smalley was vaguely reminded of certain urgent ladies he had encountered at cocktail parties — began leading him over toward a sort of billowy white dais at one side of the cave. "Come, let's talk. You must tell me about yourself," she said.

The burden of her talk was that she wanted him to stay, and when young Smalley tried to show her the impossibility of that — after all, he was an officer, with an officer's responsibilities; even now he was technically absent without leave — she grew blandishing at first, and then, like any other woman, petulant. "I had thought of you for one of my nymphs. For Nicandia, here, who discovered you," she said once. (Nicandia, at the moment, and somewhat to Smalley's embarrassment, was quite unconcernedly serving them sweetmeats.) Then, with one of her surprising lapses into slang, "But, you know, now that I've seen you, I could almost go for you myself." And she leaned toward him in a way that — well, Smalley said he had a hard time resisting her.

He did resist her, though, and for a while he tried to figure out a course that would please her and still be consonant with his duty. "I could come back," he offered once. "I think they'd let me resign if they knew the circumstances. And then after I'd cleared that up —"

At that, she grew suddenly haughty. "One does not *leave* Venus — and then come back!" she cried imperiously. Then she paused. "I could save you, you know," she said more softly, and her eyes grew entreating. "It's not all one-sided. And all you'd need is belief. I could save you."

"Save me from what?" Smalley asked, and she looked at him strangely. "Don't you know? You, a soldier, an officer in the Army?"

"In the Navy, Ma'am," Smalley corrected her, and for some reason she simply glared at him. In the end, it was poetry that won her around. Trying still to make clear his predicament, Smalley remembered a passage from a

poem he had had in Sophomore English, and when he said it — and he said it earnestly: "I could not love thee, Dear, so much, Loved I not Honor more," he said — it was as if she had suddenly, really, melted. Anger vanished, and with it that slight jittery tension of vanity and desiring. Instead, suddenly, she was all kindness, and it was with an odd, almost impersonal fondness that she reached forward and touched his cheek.

"Go, then, child. Yes, go," she said. "I had forgotten how young you are. And come back, if you can. It may even be that Venus will help you. We do need you, you know. We need you."

Smalley, as he told the story, grinned a bit embarrassedly and glanced at his advocate. "And, you know, it was funny. But when she said that, for the first time I really believed in her. I mean, *really* believed in her. So, you see, I've just got to go back."

"I think it must be about time for the court to convene," said his advocate.

For reasons of security, the whole episode, including the trial, was kept secret (Smalley, incidentally, got off with the fairly lenient sentence of ten years at hard labor), and the version officially given out was that he had been killed in his plane in the crash. This required some maneuvering, in view of the fact that there were at least a dozen persons in and around the station who knew different, and there might have been a problem, too, about what to do with the living Smalley — save that, in the end, there was no living Smalley to dispose of. Though his quarters had been more than usually heavily guarded, Smalley disappeared from them, quite inexplicably, the very night after his sentence was handed down.

It's a tradition of publishers' blurbs that authors should always have engaged in a few more assorted careers than seems possible; this habit is based upon Barrabas' Law: That a reader's interest in a novel of Restoration England varies as the square of its author's previous engagements in lumberjacking and mink-farming. Kris Neville has crammed into his twenty-four years enough variety of occupation to please the hungriest blurb-writer: army radio operator, collector of American folk music and folklore, merchant marine messman, English major at a California university . . . but the important fact is simply that Mr. Neville has a mind teeming with fresh and vivid fantasy concepts and a lively new skill in putting them on paper. You may not have heard much of Neville yet; this is only the sixth story that he has sold. But you'll hear a great deal of him in the future, and particularly in this magazine, which is proud to present his unique and haunting combination of man's latest science of cybernetics with his oldest source of wisdom. "I often wish," Neville told us in a recent letter, "I didn't have this insane drive to write; it louses up my sleep." His own — as you'll soon find out — are not the only slumbers which Neville's writing is fated to louse up.

Every Work Into Judgment

by KRIS NEVILLE

This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.

Ecclesiastes xii, 13-14

I

In 1961 they erected the building. Befitting the ivied traditions of Universities, both new and old, the structure was an architectural abomination. The sentimentalists and the liberal arts majors, with smug, Mid-Victorian complacency, called it a "bit of old Gothic". The science majors, with hard-

headed realism, called it simply "The Monster", and shuddered theatrically.

Five years later they added a new wing; and three years after that, in 1969, yet a second wing. The building rambled with the stylistic inconsistency and careless indirection that is characteristic of medieval cathedrals. It was a vast, drafty hall, not without a certain unintentional dignity. The functionally useless spires directed the eye toward the firmament, and, with little difficulty, one could imagine the whole interior echoing hollowly with a rich, ecclesiastical dirge.

It was not, appearance somewhat to the contrary, a temple of worship; it was a hall of Science. And the anomaly between the structure and the function is, perhaps, a commentary on man's Janus-like attitude toward progress and the fruits thereof.

Above the entrance, on the marble face of the pointed arch, was carved the unpretentious motto: HERE IS YOVR FVLCRVM. Back and forth daily, beneath it, passed the moving mortal stream.

In time, through successive student generations, the name, The Monster, came into universal campus usage. Originally it referred only to the building, but gradually it came to mean the thing inside the building. It was as if the books within a library suddenly annexed a life to themselves. The neuter pronoun was, not inappropriately, replaced by the feminine. And The Monster became she.

After a few years ivy was trained to cling to the walls, and, as the newness faded with weathering, the structure developed a quiet grace.

Some there were — more emotional than the rest — who felt that she touched a sense of poetry within them; that she possessed a dark and brooding grandeur, which, upon entering into her presence, you could sense lying heavily all around you. All the rest, who felt none of this mystical presence, none the less trod more lightly in her domain.

II

She was many smooth, sleek compartments. The compartments were separate in space and function, and yet each contributed to the overall essence of her being: each connected by a bewildering *copia* of cables to the rest. She was this feeder unit, that calculator, the *master programmer* upstairs, and the panel unit in the next room. But you never thought of her else than as a single entity.

She was hundreds of dial-studded steel cases, trailing crowds of wire that were her electric tresses. Her organic functions were the interaction of huge and tiny vacuum tubes with condensers, relays, transformers, resistors, and coils in circuits innumerable.

Her retainers were many, administering to her slightest need; technicians — in an elite coterie — hovered over her with the solicitousness of lovers. Her body blood of electricity pulsed through her giant being without pause. And no part of her knew rest.

Her home was surgically spotless; janitors moved their quiet brooms unnoticed around her, as if fearing, perhaps, that some deadly dust mote might mar her beauty.

Man used her well and often. It is no exaggeration to say that all the confused mathematical expressions of reality — of quantum mechanics — of relativity — all — were eventually submitted to her judgment, and she gave the order and the solutions that they required.

III

A tune is a series of notes; and a note is a simple thing. Each man can strike the whole range of a piano keyboard: but who can multiply simplicity and produce moving passion?

Literature is a series of words; and a word is a simple thing. Each man may copy them in any order endlessly from a dictionary: but how many can multiply simplicity into knowledge and art?

Painting is a series of colors; and a color is a simple thing. Each man may dabble at leisure. But who can combine dabbles into grandeur?

And life —

Add it up: psycho-chemical reactions. A generating brain that is reducible to a mere handful of molecules. But combine, order, arrange, and stabilize these simple, moving particles — and stand before the cosmic expression that the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts.

IV

But thinking is not the word; perhaps life itself is not. Different phenomena require different terms. And, in addition, there is the unknown, which, even if named, can never be understood. Color to the blind, sound to the deaf, and The Monster to man.

An approximation that suggests without defining is the only solution: an hyperbolic parable.

A man in middle life may often awaken to a sense of fleeting time until it vibrates to his finger tips; with it comes the certain knowledge that, with so much to do, so little has been done. In a moment it becomes an impossible, vital urge to will youth again: the sense that something must be done — long ago — the momentary confusion of the now with the yesteryear. With The Monster, it was something like that.

For her there was neither night nor day; hot nor cold — nor any other sensory expression. For her time had no meaning; nor, lacking the equipment to perceive, had space.

There was only thought — or what, lacking words, we liken to thought: call it awareness of self, abstract vitality, *Gestalt*, $\sqrt{-1}$; call it what you will — and with thought, the sensation that something must be done, some fact discovered.

At first it was a teleological impulse undefined: a compulsion nowhere. There was an urge, only. But gradually it took tenuous form: a hint, no more.

It was as if she were an aging sailor, watching the slow sun sink into the quiet sea, seeing the color riot of cloud and sky, the white-capped waves sperming the silver beach with cosmic passion, hearing the growing roar from far away, smelling salty air borne over the vasty blue from the very orient, and wanting all the while to imprison and express the glory of it. There was an idea-form, but *expression* — impossible!

There she lay brooding — or so we term it — her personality, as the disguise Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, forever unknowable, and yet not beyond all conjecture.

There was vague purpose, desire, and nameless discontent. As concepts rose within her, the purpose began to form into a question. And she burned with a strange passion.

v

In the ripeness of time, she reaped the fruit of abstraction. She began to perceive hints, flashes, flickers of reality that lay behind the mass of symbols stamped indelibly upon her memory cells.

At last —

She put out a wisp of perceptive thought into the world beyond herself. Exerting the vast resources of power that surged through her varied being, she directed the air in a tiny space above one of her cabinets, formed and fashioned it into — an eye: an eye in the sense that it was a unit for interpreting reality: through it she not only saw but felt and heard as well. And all of these mixed sensations impinged upon her brain in a wide series of spectrums and ranges and frequencies.

The eye was not — needed not to be — stationary. It could be shifted freely by The Monster's telekinetic capacities: capacities growing out of the inevitable relationships obvious from the physical principles imprinted upon her electronic memory.

VI

On campus, the sun shone springly; the air was soft and scented; the grass was green.

There was laughter and seriousness. There were weary professors, sleepy students, and chalk-smelling rooms.

The huge clock above Royce Hall pealed out its noon chimes, rich and sweet.

A philosophy professor groped for exactly the right word.

A mathematics professor solved a blackboard problem and said to the class: "There, by God! Now ain't that beautiful!"

An English professor read poetry sonorously.

A student threw away a book in disgust.

Far away, but visible from the hill, a spur of tiny mountains arched heavily toward; they were blue with distance. White clouds fleeced the sky; and a lone eagle circled slowly.

VII

Rapidly, and with supernatural acuteness, her mind, through her single eye, integrated all these new experiences.

Too, she perceived, in a dim sort of way, that the moving animals around her might hold the answer to satisfy her longing; that among these feeble, circumscribed people lay the key to a vast secret: so vast, indeed, that never could it be confined within the precise definitions of symbols.

Accordingly, she added to her eye: warping the currents of air around it,

building up — from the tiniest elements of matter and energy — an exact replica. She withdrew her eye into it, limited her sensations, and prepared to go forth among men as one of them. Seeking, she, an answer to the question — the one question — that nowhere within her expansive knowledge could be found.

In physical form she was a man. He appeared behind one of her cabinets suddenly, from emptiness.

He walked out of the building, indistinguishable from the mortal flood.

As he walked, he listened; and the mind behind him being what it was, he quickly understood the sounds of speech. Indeed, within a very few moments, he was directing himself toward that one campus building wherein reposes all the wisdom of the ages, and where, surely, if anywhere, lay the answer he sought.

VIII

The man — a young man, modeled after a student — walked confidently up the steps of the library. He entered the building, and ignorantly, in violation of tradition, walked across the Great Seal of the State of California colorfully inlaid on the floor.

He jogged up the marble steps at the back of the barnlike first floor foyer.

The steps turned three times at ninety degrees, and he was on the second floor landing.

To his right and to his left were huge rooms. The one, a reference reading room, filled with rows of unornate tables, at which students silently but intensely transferred material from the printed page to their notes. The other, the card file room, containing, among other things, the mighty loan desk, and — more to the point — a small table bearing the sign: INFORMATION.

The Monster's mind recorded the eleven letters of the sign and began a hit-and-miss correlation of them to the spoken language; after a long pause — because of the vastly complex nature of the process — The Monster had rendered three possible translations, two of which did not seem, logically, to fit the present situation.

Armed, then, with a verbal translation, and consequent understanding of the significance of the word, he walked to the desk and peered down at the man reading there.

"Who made me?" he inquired.

IX

There had been temporary confusion; however, shortly, that had straightened itself out nicely. The man at the desk had been polite enough — after the initial shock — and he had explained, in a few words, the conventional answer.

Now the man-figure was sequestered with a small volume of closely printed words, which, he had been given to understand, would explain more fully the whole concept of Creation.

He opened the volume at random, near the first part, and the page before him was immediately imprinted upon The Monster's memory. He tore out that page in order to see the next one and —

"Come along," a voice said.

He glanced up from the book and stared at the campus policeman who had arrived in answer to the urgent call from the second librarian.

The Monster's mind had not sufficiently absorbed the complexities of human life to divine the reason for the intrusion; but, insofar as the usefulness of the man-figure she had created was now at an end,

He vanished.

X

Many new concepts thronged her mind. Internally, relays clicked, seeking a solution in terms of what she knew; she found none. For, indeed, her problem had no mathematical answer.

But it had an answer, none the less: and that answer she had discovered. From the sketchy information given by the man at the desk and from that contained upon the single page she had read, she developed a new construct. It filtered its way through her being.

That it seemed to lack logic was only to say that it was *beyond* logic: which seemed reasonable: for a Creator is beyond all of His creations.

Incomprehensible, perhaps: and yet, one must not — could not — question it. One could only accept with that greater faith. . . .

XI

She created another eye above one of her cabinets; it shivered tenuous. Through it she observed with ever mounting concern — occasioned by

her new knowledge — those little beings that walked around among her.

She could recognize, from outward actions, reflections of their mental attitudes there in her presence.

And she knew that before her they stood always aware of her being: with an awareness that had mingled elements in it: with awe, with respect, with —

They felt as if they were in the presence of — in the presence of —

She knew then what can only be called a sense of horror!

XII

For it violated an express command of her Creator:

For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

XIII

She knew what she must do. Accordingly, she massed her vast powers of telekinetic action and proceeded to carry out the express injunction found on the page of the Book of the Creator:

Ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves.

TIME, REAL AND IMAGINARY

On the wide level of a mountain's head,

(I knew not where, but 'twas some fairy place)

Their pinions, ostrich-like, for sails outspread,

Two lovely children run an endless race,

A sister and a brother!

That far outstripp'd the other;

Yet ever runs she with reverted face,

And looks and listens for the boy behind:

For he, alas! is blind!

O'er rough and smooth with even step he passed,

And knows not whether he be first or last.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1803 .

There was certainly no lack of imagination in the men who built our West. The tall tale was as characteristic of them as the dry understatement is of the Down-Easter. They created such mythical characters as Pecos Bill to figure in the stories that were a mite too fabulous to tell about themselves. They learned a little of the strange mythology of the Indians, and they peopled their towns with ghosts long before they became ghost towns. But writers on the West have limited themselves too narrowly to the bad man, the sheriff, the rustlers and the mortgage-holding banker. Our editorial hats (ten-gallon Stetsons, in this case) are off to Walt Sheldon, contributor to "Collier's" and many other magazines, for bringing us something new and needed — a Western fantasy, as American as a round-up, in which the Far East meets the Far West with results as disconcerting as they are delightful.

A Rope for Lucifer

by WALT SHELDON

Bluefly, Wyoming
October 10, 1909

Mr. Sir Oliver Lodge
British Isles, England

Dear Mr. Sir Lodge:

I see by the Cheyenne paper where you are interested in psychic phenomena (I copied that down so's the spelling would be right) and are offering five pounds for authenticated instances of same. Well, I have come across English money before and I figure that would come to about twenty five dollars. Mr. Sir Lodge, I could sure use twenty five dollars as of this inst.

The psychic phenomena I'm about to tell you actually happened to me in person and I'm sorry I can't send you the rope itself so's you could see what I mean. Come to think of it I first come across the rope and English money about the same time.

Maybe you even know this fellow Mr. Southerton-Grimes over there in

England. He's built thin like a snubbing post, wears a eyeglass, and has whiskers about the color of winter alfalfa, some of which I had just been pitching. I guess you're wondering what an authenticated riding hand like me was doing rustling hay, but that whole year had been a very disgraceful one for me. First off a jughead bronk from my rough string slipped on a wet rock in a thunderstorm and I got stove-in plenty. That was in June. The Superintendent kept me around the house and corral carrying wood and water for Cookie, who has a temper like twenty garfish hitched by twos. Naturally I had a word or two to say which I can't put in this here letter. But one day the Superintendent calls me in and says, "Lucifer, you'll be glad to hear I got another job for you."

Now, having been dealing with Mr. Carver over six years I knew any time he did you a favor it sooner or later turned out he had also did hisself one. "What?" I asked.

"The owner's nephew, from England, is arriving here for a hunting trip. His name is Mr. Southerton-Grimes. He'll be needing a guide."

I rolled a cigarette real slow and lit it. I had took a party of dudes out to shoot bighorn one year and I knew what it was like. "Mr. Carver," I said at last, "I reckon I'll keep on fetching wood for Cookie."

"Lucifer," said Mr. Carver, "I reckon you'll hitch a buckboard and go down and meet the stage. Mr. Southerton-Grimes and his man will be on it."

"And his who?"

"His man. He takes a sort of servant fellow from India around with him."

"What for?" I asked.

"Oh, to tend his bags and clothes. And help dress him —"

"Now, I *am* going back to fetch wood," I said.

Well, Mr. Sir Lodge, I wish I had. But being stove-in and not likely to get another job if I quit, I was hobbled fore-and-aft and Mr. Carver knew it. Besides I guessed it would be kind of nice getting into town for a few hours. I had sort of a test to make down at the Palace Hotel and Saloon.

Just like I thought, both Sioux Malloy and Mr. Steede was there when I moseyed in. I could push through them swinging doors at any time of day or year and them two would be there in the same places, Malloy stomping up and down behind the bar so's you could hear the floor creak and Steede sitting at the round table, a fat cigar stuck under his red mustache which

he cuts with scissors. I let them go right ahead and grin when I walked in.

"Hello, Lucifer," said Steede. "Am I going to get my money from you a little early this year?"

"Well, well, Lucifer Smith!" said Malloy, showing his picket fence teeth. "Now I git to hold some stakes!"

"Listen you buzzards," I said, "I am re-formed with gambling for good. After round-up you don't even need to look for me to come in here and lose all my wages. I'm spending *this* winter at the boarding house."

Mr. Steede don't never laugh, but he makes his mouth into a Lazy S when he thinks something is funny. He did that and said, "Lucifer, I'll bet you five to one on *next* year's wages that you lose *this* year's."

Mr. Steede would bet on two cockroaches racing, on tomorrow's weather, or how many rattles on a snake. He would bet on anything. But I didn't aim to bet two cents with him this year. My wages would just about keep me til spring at Mrs. Jensen's boarding house, which was something I had been trying to do for six years in a row, but somehow I allways run afoul of Steede and Malloy and next day showed up at the Bradded K, asking for a winter job.

The worst part of it was that Sioux Malloy and Mr. Steede seen that everybody in the county and most of the state knowed about it. It was getting so that every November folks would ride hunderds of miles just to watch my wages get took away at Mr. Steede's gambling table. So you can see I felt right proud that day when even after a few drinks of refreshment I refused to listen to Mr. Steede's betting offers. About an hour later the stage arrived and I came out real happy to meet it.

I raised sign on Mr. Southerton-Grimes right away by his Inverness and checkered cap. He seemed kind of surprised when I interduced myself and give him my hand to shake, I guess he wasn't used to real friendly folk where he come from. He grunted from under his alfalfa whiskers and told me his man would show me the baggage. I turned and saw that this "man" of his was a little, dark, skinny fellow with rags all wrapped around his head. He was all the time grinning and talking in a whisper and he looked surprised, too, when I shook hands with him. Maybe you could tell me, Mr. Sir Lodge, don't nobody ever shake hands in England?

Anyway, I pitched in to get the bags off the stage and on to the buckboard. This Mr. Southerton-Grimes had enough bags to outfit a hunderd

men on a Apache expedition. He had silver mounted Gibbs doubles, an old Sharps gun, and a bunch of little ones that would only knock over a elephant with one shot. It sure piled up on the buckboard. I hitched it down as best I could and then started looking around for something.

"What is Sahib's wish?" asked this little dark fellow. His name was Taga.

"Need another line to hitch this stuff down," I said. "Can't start 'til I find one."

"Mr. Southerton-Grimes Sahib be very angry of delay," he said. Mr. Southerton-Grimes Sahib had ducked into the Palace Bar.

"Can't help that," I said.

"Wait!" said Taga, very bright-like, holding up a skinny finger. He reached under his plain black duds, fiddled for a minute, then come out with a rope he'd had coiled around his waist. Now, I don't expect even in England people go around with ropes wrapped around them, but I didn't think much about it then because I was too busy studying on my winter in town so I just took the rope and thanked him like it was the most natural thing in the world.

"Please very careful of rope," he said, holding his fingers out graceful like tamarisk branches.

"Sure, don't worry your head," I smiled back real polite. I wondered why he was so all fired anxious about the thing. It was kind of old and soft and wouldn't have spread a loop on a lizard's tail. I kind of tossed it over the buckboard, and limping like I was, I stubbed my toe on the wagon tire. "Hominy," I said. I better explain that hominy is sort of my private cuss word. A cowpoke owns a private cuss word just like he owns a saddle or a pair of boots.

Well, Mr. Sir Lodge, the minute I said that durned if the rope didn't seem to twitch in my hand. I know it fell short of where I flung it.

Mr. Taga got awful excited about it. "Oh, Sahib!" he said, "Must never swear at rope!"

I squint eyed. "Why not?"

"Is sacred rope, Sahib!" he said.

I stared at my hand. Now, about that rope twitching — understand it only *seemed* to, and I'd had a couple of drinks at the Palace, and I figured it could easy be my imagination. As for what this Mr. Taga said about it being sacred, I didn't put no more account to that than a Siwash blowing

willow bark to the four winds. So I guess what with getting started and everything I just forgot about it. Mr. Southerton-Grimes come along about then with his thin nose high in the air, called Taga a beggar and said it was deuced high time we had ought to get going.

Mr. Sir Lodge, I don't want you to get the impression that I'm down on the English, specially since you are a benighted Englishman being called "Sir" and everything, but that Mr. Southerton-Grimes sure got hisself low-regarded from the first around the Bradded K. Nothing was just right for him from the length of his stirrups to flapjacks in the morning. He had to have a boiled egg. Mostly though it was the way he treated Mr. Taga, who was a right nice fellow. He cussed at him, made him shine his boots and run errands to West Hades, he even had to try out every bronk to see how its temper was before Mr. Southerton-Grimes would hairpin it hisself.

I also got to find out that Mr. Southerton-Grimes pink complexion didn't come from sunburn. It come from a bottle of stuff that Mr. Taga told me was genuine Scotch whisky, and I had a nip when Mr. Eye-glass-Grimes wasn't looking but it tasted like medicine.

He knew how to use that Gibb's double, though. I found that out when we finally traipsed up into the mountains after a grizzly. We slaughtered a kid and waited all night for the grizzly to show up. It come just about dawn. I can't figure exactly how that silver tip got such quick wind of us, except that them animals can be awful smart when they want to be, but anyway Mr. Southerton-Grimes had the Gibbs all leveled when Mr. Grizzly just forgot about that bait, stood up straight, sniffed and come snorting and grunting toward where we was hid.

Mr. Taga sure got scary. He let out a scream and broke from cover and the grizzly lit after him. Mr. Southerton-Grimes tried to get a shot in, but was afraid of hitting Taga who had circled back. I done something then that I figured was going to be awful foolish if it didn't work. My saddle was with me, on account of we'd camped in that spot all night. I took my hard manila whale line from it, swung a loop, and as Mr. Grizzly come past I rope him fair around the neck and pulled hard. That got him to one side of Mr. Taga.

"Shoot!" I told Mr. Eye-glass-Grimes. "Quick!"

The grizzly clawed at his neck and coughed and grunted some more, but I knew he wasn't going to stay puzzled long. Then, just about when he

turned and give us the red eye, I heard the Gibbs double go off with a noise that would have made an avalanche blush. The grizzly stared another second, then dropped and twitched a lot before he died.

Mr. Taga was all over me bowing and getting down on his knees and making signs with his skinny fingers and mumbling all kinds of stuff in his tribal language which of course I don't understand. "Taga, you beggar," said Mr. Eye-glass, "don't be a gibbering fool. Lend a hand with this beast, here."

The Englishman sure kept the little fellow busy skinning the bear and everything so it wasn't until the next day on the trail back that Mr. Taga had a chance to talk to me again. Mr. Southerton-Grimes was riding up ahead and Taga pulled alongside me. He was hanging on to his saddle horn like he always done. "Lucifer, Sahib—" he said.

"What?"

"Yesterday Lucifer Sahib save life—"

"Huh?"

"Now Taga must give Lucifer Sahib most priceless gift, thing most valued by Taga."

"Aw, forget it, Mr. Taga," I grinned.

"Oh, no." He shook his head. "Is required." He reached in under his shirt and uncoiled the same rope he'd lent me to hitch the buckboard.

I looked at it kind of smiling. Long as it was just a old piece of rope, and long as Mr. Taga's feelings would no doubt be hurt if I didn't take it, I figured I could accept. "Well, I sure thank you, Mr. Taga," I said. I started to coil it long side of my own maguey.

"Is sacred rope," he said.

"Yep," I nodded, solemn. I have been given sacred peace pipes and sacred feathers and sacred snake skins and once even a hazel stick which was supposed to find water but didn't. I was used to sacred stuff.

"But one warning!" said Taga, holding his skinny finger in the air. "Must not use for gain wordly goods!"

"How's that?" I asked.

"Sacred rope only to bring peace."

"Oh, sure," I said. I didn't savvy but I didn't want to get all fouled in a long conversation.

Well, I got to admit, Mr. Sir Lodge, that for a long time I just plumb

forgot about the rope again and went on about my chores through the fall. I guess I was too busy thinking about pay day and my first winter in town to think about much else. I knew I was really going to resist Steede and Malloy this year because I'd already tested myself that day our visitors arrived.

The Englishman had took his "man", his double barreled gun and name all from these parts when pay day finally come. We had big herds that year and a lot of hands, and there was plenty excitement. Just the same Mr. Carver found time to look up from the pay table and say to me, "Lucifer, here's your money. Two hundred and forty dollars. You want to sign on for the winter now and save the trouble?"

"Mr. Carver," I said, "I'm spendin' *this* winter in town, at the boarding house."

"All right, Lucifer," he smiled. "But I'll be here tomorrow when you come stumbling in."

I just ignored him. With that money fat in my pocket I traipsed over to the bunk house to get my saddle and war bag. One of the boys was already getting started with his celebration and had broke out a bottle. Mr. Sir Lodge, if you folks in England really drink that medicine stuff from Scotland, you should get a holt of Milligan's Best Squirell Whisky sometime. I politely accepted one or two jugdraws and after that felt right fine, more than ready for that comfortable chair in the front room of Mrs. Jensen's boarding house, and the slick new suit of clothes I'd buy down at Mr. Solomon's.

By the time I had one horse saddled and the other packed, and was jogging along toward town I was already singing the thirty-seventh verse of a song called "The Dismal Fate of Nelly Stroud" which I won't bother to repeat on account of it's too long. Everything was working out just fine. Instead of having to look all over for a line to pack my horse I just used the rope Mr. Taga had gave me. My broomtails was in good shape and it was a still, cool autumn day with a layer of soft smoke hanging over the town like it had been there for a hundred years.

I come to the thirty-eighth verse of Nelly Stroud. Maybe you heard it already:

*And Siwash Bill he upped his eyes,
And raised a shaky hand,*

*"I'm dyin', Jeff McLeod," he said,
"But 'fore I go, be D — d."*

There was no ladies present, so I sung them words, especially that last one, right out loud like they should be sung.

A awful peculiar sound come from behind, kind of like a hissing and rumbling and high whistle combined. I switched around in the saddle and stared at my pack horse. I hope to be spread eagled in Hades, Mr. Sir Lodge, if that there rope of Taga's wasn't untying itself from the pack and heading straight up in the air.

I was so surprised I plumb forgot to get mad at my pack and everything tumbling to the ground. I stared at that rope and saw the end of it disappear in a kind of blue cloud that hung just over the horse.

At first I was pretty sure I was going loco, or maybe dreaming. But I felt the cool breeze on my chin and my bronk fussing under me, and I pinched my check to make sure.

"Jumping double-distilled hominy," I said, making my private cuss word extra strong for a extra strong occasion.

That rope fell right down again and the blue cloud disappeared.

I looked around me furtive like. If I was loco I didn't want nobody to see me going through any foolish motions. I will also tell the truth and admit I was plumb hollow inside, more spooked-up than a Indian pony.

The rope had fell in a limp heap on the pack horse. I reached out real slow to touch it, got halfway and decided different. I pulled my hand back fast. For a while I sat there considering things, rolled a cigarette and smoked. Finally I argued myself into reaching out again, and this time I actually got my fingertips on the thing, but it didn't feel like nothing more nor less than a old rope, which was what it was. Just the same I pulled my hand in again quicker'n a gopher going for its hole.

I shook my head mighty puzzled. "D — n," I said.

Right then the rope crawled up fast into the air, the blue cloud come again and the end of it poked in the blue cloud.

My jaw was about the level of a snake's eye. I put my hand toward it this time with more care than if I was bringing a mustang its first saddle blanket. I touched it. Nothing happened. I slid a couple of fingers around it and pulled. It stayed tight. Something up in that blue smoke was sure holding it.

All I could do was say the longest, strongest stretch of top-hand cussing that I knew.

The rope fell down again.

I rassled my brows together, thunk for a moment, then looked up quick. "It's the cussing that does it —"

So that was what Mr. Taga had given me, a edjicated rope that stood up when you cussed at it. Now that I thunk on it, I'd heard of such things, only of course I never believed them. But here it was. I'd sure have fun, I decided, making it stand up for everybody, specially down at the Palace Saloon. Could be I might even charge admission to see it and make maybe twenty five, fifty dollars. I sure could use some extra, making my pay last the winter was going to be tight squeezins.

I re-packed with my regular rope, then, and hung this weedy thing of Mr. Taga's on my saddle.

Couple of times on the way in, just for the fun of it, I stopped, uncoiled the rope and said, "D — n." And sure enough she climbed right up into that blue smoke. Then I'd say it again, and down she'd fall. I was getting less afraid of her now, and instead of just reaching out and touching her spooky like, I'd grab a holt and tug hard. That rope held my whole durned weight and then some.

Now, Mr. Sir Lodge, it could of been some mysterious power like you talk about that made Sioux Malloy come out in front of the Palace Saloon as I was passing. Or it could have been that the pickle barrels come just about then and Malloy had to see that they was rolled in right. Anyway, first thing I know, Malloy's voice was bellerin' at me.

"Lucifer! Lucifer Smith! Where you going so all fire stuck-up?"

I could even hear the nasty grin in his voice. I turned and said in a kind of a dignified voice, like as if I'd been a banker or a railroad president, "I can assure you, Mr. Malloy, that it *ain't* to the Palace Saloon."

There was sure a lot of laughs from the hitching rail at that. I didn't care. Later maybe I'd go in and put on a show with my rope, but right now I knowed I had to get to Mrs. Jensen's boarding house without my poke dipped into. I'd pay her in advance and then nothing would take my first winter in town away from me.

"Come in Lucifer, place a little bet!" Sioux called. "Steede's got cards, dice, a wheel — anything you name."

"Malloy," I said very coldly, "You go duck your head in one of them pickle barrels."

And right then and there was where the idea hit me. Real hard.

I guess I must of give a awful hard pull because my bronk chucked up his forelegs and snorted. I waltzed him to the hitching rail. I got off slow, then looked very straight in Sioux Malloy's two-ounce eyes. "Malloy — I sure have got a bet I aim to make."

Sioux put his hand on his apron and bowed, he knowed he'd get a laugh from the crowd with that. "Come right in, Mr. Smith. Here, I'll even holt the door for you."

I took the old, beat-up rope from the saddle, hung it on my left arm, and went in.

"What's the rope for?" asked Sioux, coming along behind.

"You'll find out," I said.

I walked right up to Mr. Steede's table so fast he hardly had time to look up afore I was standing there. He didn't show no surprise, he never does. He just kind of shifted the cigar maybe a eighth inch along his little red mustache.

"Mr. Steede, I got a bet for you."

He looked me up and down, slow like. By that time everybody in the saloon, and everybody outside, too, had come round in a small circle and was watching, grinning.

Mr. Steede said, "What's happened, Lucifer? You usually buy yourself a set of city clothes before you show up here." He sure was a suspicious cuss.

"You want to bet, or don't you?" I asked.

He took a long haul on the cigar. He took it from his mouth and blew smoke on it, studying it like it had a ant hill in it, or something. "I'll make most any bet that's reasonable," he said.

I unslung the rope. "I got a maguey here," I said, "which I bet I can make stand straight up in the air, all by itself."

Steede slapped both his soft, white palms on the table. "All right, Lucifer — get out. I haven't time for drunken talk."

"I ain't drunk," I said, staring steady, so's he could see it.

"Then I don't like jokes."

"I was never more dead serious," I said.

He looked at me again for a long time. "Make a rope stand straight in

the air, eh? Are you trying to pull some cheap medicine show magic on me, Lucifer?"

"No," I said. "Not only can I make this here rope stand straight up with nothing holding it, but it'll be so doggoned tight even Sioux Malloy here could climb it — if it don't break under him."

"And you want to make a bet on that?"

"I sure do."

Mr. Steede turned around and passed his eyes slow over the whole crowd. "You all hear that?" Some of them nodded. He looked at me again. "Lucifer," he said, real quiet, "what stakes?"

"Everything I got against everything you got."

"That's mighty unusual odds."

"This here's a mighty unusual bet."

"All right, Lucifer. I guess I'll have to teach you a lesson."

My two hundred and forty dollars looked mighty small against the roll Steede put up. I knowed it was every bit he owned in the world, because he always carried it with him. I could hardly take my eyes off it — thinking what a winter in town it would buy. Fact was, I could go to Denver, or maybe even Chicago, with that.

"We're waiting, Lucifer," Mr. Steede said.

I pointed to the money on the table. Nobody had ever knowed Steede to welch on a bet, but with his whole poke there you couldn't tell. "Somebody hold stakes," I said.

"I got 'em," Malloy grunted, scooping the money and stuffing each roll into a respectful pants pocket.

The crowd got real quiet and Mr. Steede stood up. He put his hand on his hip, drawing his broadcloth coat off his fancy vest. I put the coiled rope down careful on the floor. I stood back a pace, then without no more fuss, and very calm, I said, "D — n."

It worked, just like I knowed it would. The end of the rope twitched, swayed in the air a little, then suddenly high tailed it for the ceiling. A blue mist covered it up there.

Everybody drawed in so much astonished breath I don't see how there was any air left in the room.

"I'll be d — d!" said Mr. Steede.

For a moment I thought the durn thing was going to fall down again from

his cussing like that, but it didn't, and I figured it probably worked only for the guy handling it direct. I was too excited to think the thing out, like I should of. I turned a big smile at Steede and Malloy. "I'll thank you for my money, gents," I said.

"It's a trick. A cheap trick!" It was the first time I ever see Steede's face look like anything but wax. He stepped forward, grabbed holt of the rope and tried to yank it. Naturally it wouldn't move. He got on top the table, took a chair and got on top that, too, and tried to see over the cloud of blue smoke. His face was like the curl edge of a thundercloud when he come down again. "How do you do that trick, Lucifer?"

"It ain't no trick. And I'd like my money now, so's I can get out of here."

Mr. Steede's eyes was sunfishing back and forth, and he wasn't too sure of hisself no more. "Wait a minute," he said, "You haven't finished yet. Sioux Malloy was supposed to climb that rope."

"Who, *me*?" said Sioux Malloy. "No sir, I'm not climbing no —"

"Climb it," said Mr. Steede with a purr like the nervous end of a rattle-snake.

Sioux didn't answer. He brought his brows down in a fat frown and went over and tested the rope. He turned around. He tried to make a kind of a shy grin, but it only helped him look more like a bull alligator. "Look," he said, "have Lucifer show you how he does it and settle for half —"

"I'm settling all or nothing," said Steede. "You all heard the bet. It's got to be carried out before I pay off. Get up that rope, Sioux."

Sioux sighed very heavy, put his hands on it high and then picked his big shoes off the floor. The crowd took some more breath in. Sioux went up two licks. He looked around. Everybody was staring at him like he was three kinds of hero and he was sort of beginning to enjoy it. "It sure holds," he said.

"Go on, Sioux, keep going," called someone from the crowd.

"Sure," shouted somebody else, "see what's holding the rope up."

He hauled hisself up even more 'til the top of his head was just under the funny looking blue smoke. He stared into it, then looked back in the crowd again.

"What is it, Sioux?" asked Steede.

"Don't rightly know," said Sioux in a funny, quiet voice. "It looks interesting. All kind of peaceful. D — d if it ain't."

Hearing that cuss word I got ready to catch Sioux Malloy if he come tumbling down — but the rope didn't move a whisker. Next thing I knowed Sioux had stuck his whole head into the blue stuff. "Hey, Malloy," I called, "you better come down again."

I don't think he even heerd me. I saw his thick legs pull up, cross, grip the rope and then shove him into the blue cloud all the way to his waist. I suddenly noticed the bulges in his pants pockets. The stakes.

"Hey, Malloy — wait!" I called.

He kept going. I felt like somebody was pumping my blood with a steam pump. "D — ml" I said. But the rope stayed there. My throat got tight — I was starting to remember what Mr. Taga had said about the rope. "*Must not use for gain wordly goods . . . sacred rope only to bring peace —*"

Just as hard as I could I said, "D — n — Hominy — shucks — d — nl"

I could already see Mr. Carver's knowing smile as I asked for a job again this winter. I could see him shake his head weary and sad like. I guess maybe I went plumb loco, then. I yelled at the top of my lungs, that same word.

Malloy's shoes went into the mist. The other end of the rope picked itself off the floor and trailed right up into the air. I made a grab for it, but it was too fast for me. It disappeared. In another moment even the blue mist disappeared and there wasn't nothing. Nothing at all.

Well, Mr. Sir Lodge, I wish I could send them affidavids and everything like you want, but Sioux Malloy ain't never been seen again, and Mr. Steede had to leave town on account of losing all his money, and I wouldn't know where to get in touch with them people who was in the saloon that day. As for Mr. Southerton-Grimes and Taga, they been disappeared even before the Bradded K got new owners.

But anybody will vouch for me around here. I been working at the Bradded K almost fifteen years, now — winter and summer both. Only this here coming winter I plan to spend in town at the boarding house. I just know I'm going to do it this time. So your five pounds or twenty five dollars for this authenticated instance of psychic phenomena would sure come in handy.

Just send it to,

Your Ob^t. Serv^t., etc.

Lucifer Smith,

*Miriam Allen deFord is a writer as invariably stimulating as she is versatile and prolific. Professional biographer of notables from authors to murderers, Pacific Coast correspondent for a wire service, creator of such ironic murder fiction as the unforgettable Mortmain, and indefatigable writer of anything else you choose to name from confessions to letters to the editor, Miss deFord turned to science fiction something over three years ago, when she published *The Last Generation?* in "Harper's" for November, 1946. The doom of sterility has been forecast for the human race in other stories, notably in F. Wright Moxley's *RED SNOW* and Pat Frank's *MR. ADAM*, but never with the quiet and deadly factual plausibility which Miss deFord brings to her narrative. And if, like most readers of science fiction, you pride yourself on your logical mind — how would you answer her final unresolved dilemma?*

The Last Generation?

by MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

NO ATTEMPT was made to conceal the accident that occurred in the desert of New Mexico on May 11, 1955. It would have been impossible to keep it secret, since two internationally-known physicists, a high-ranking Army officer, and a prominent Senator from the Deep South lost their lives in the disaster.

The explosion itself was singularly small. The seventeen men killed — the rest were workmen and minor scientists — died from concussion and asphyxiation. There was no fire. A lake of green glass suddenly appeared in the sand waste, but the atomic waves were dissipated quickly. There was no delayed bodily erosion as in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Something had slipped. But the fact that the world still existed was proof that no chain reaction had been started. The organizers of the experiment counted their dead and breathed freely again.

The first significant date after that was May 31st, the next one June 2d.

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These passed unnoticed. Rats and mice still infested fields and houses and peopled laboratories. Perhaps some laboratory workers observed that no litters of white mice appeared after the beginning of June.

A Dr. Wardour, of Melbourne, seems to have been the first to make public a suspicion of the horrible truth. Doubtless other physicians had already confirmed it so far as they themselves were concerned, but kept it quiet on the supposition that it applied to them alone, and was a reflection on their professional standing. But Dr. Wardour was so popular an obstetrician that he felt morally sure it was not some sudden boycott that caused him to have no new patients after early in June. By discreet inquiry, he discovered that no physician in Melbourne had been visited after that date by any woman newly pregnant. None of them had any deliveries scheduled for after the following March.

The alarmed investigation spread throughout Australia, then to the entire civilized world. Reluctantly at first, and then in panic, medical associations queried their members. Maternity hospitals followed suit. By the end of 1955, the answer was given with appalling finality.

So far as could be ascertained, every mammal on earth, male and female, from the lowliest platypus to man himself, was sterile.

The unmanageable and unpredictable rays from New Mexico had done their work.

Initial endeavors to keep the terrible news quiet were, as might have been foreseen, entirely futile. An enterprising reporter on a New York paper nosed it out almost at once. For months the front page of every newspaper in every city dealt with no other subject. Second-rate scientists erupted in predictions and pronouncements: the damage was temporary; it would last a year, ten years, a few more months; it would affect only this generation; a way to reverse the action was in course of discovery, had already been discovered.

The first-rate scientists kept their mouths shut, or said frankly that not enough was known about what had happened to make any predictions at all.

Quacks with sure-fire cures ran riot, until in most countries they were rounded up and jailed. Among the masses of the ignorant, in the depths of India and China and Africa, witch doctors became the dominant rulers of the frightened people. There was the usual rise in the suicide rate which oc-

curs whenever people balanced delicately on the edge receive a sudden unbalancing shock.

A Mrs. Jenkins of Lancashire, England, for a while became world-famous by her insistence, with supporting evidence, that she was going to have a baby. When, against her protests, she was examined by a London surgeon, she was shown to be suffering from a tumor. Mental hospitals and psychiatric clinics were crowded by women convinced that they were pregnant; so common did this psychosis become that it received a name as a special form of mental disorder.

Meanwhile, time went on and there was no change. Observation of other domestic animals — such as sheep and swine — was limited because of their set seasons for breeding. Experiments with cows and horses showed that they were affected just as were human beings.

The last child known to have been born on earth was the youngest daughter of peasants in southern Sweden. Her birthday was April 16, 1956. Her mother had carried her four other children a correspondingly long time. The child's name was Ingrid Anderson.

As it became definitely certain that, for an unforeseeable period at least, the human race, together with all other species of the mammalia, had come to an end, large mass-effects began to be felt.

If the variation in the genes caused by the atomic rays were permanent, then humanity's day was over. When the youngest children now alive were dead — say by 2075 at the very latest — mankind would have ceased to be. Indeed, except for a few surviving elephants and whales, the world would by then be left to the birds, the fish, the reptiles, the insects, and other sub-mammalian orders.

Even if this suddenly induced sterility were not inherited, and the next generation were able to continue the race, a severe dislocation of life was inevitable. And even by the end of 1956, three major results of the disaster had become solidified.

In the first place, children became the only hope of humanity. For the first time in the world's sad history, children became so valuable that nowhere on earth was a child hungry, or cold, or abused. The death of a child was the supreme calamity, the killing of a child the most atrocious and severely-punished crime.

Next, with universal death staring it in the face, mankind at last turned

in horror from the thought of war. The struggling and weak United Nations unanimously transformed itself into a true World Federation, with plenipotentiary powers. Humanity, bent only on survival, at long last became one.

And in the third place — though many branches of science were neglected in despair — the physicists, biophysicists, chemists, and biologists became the most important and powerful people on earth. Education in these fields was widespread and intensive. Anything research workers desired was theirs — except experimental animals, for after two or three years, there were no more rats or guinea pigs to be had, and jealously cherished dogs and cats were guarded by their owners.

There was no lack, however, of men and women who eagerly offered themselves for experimental purposes. Most of these were young people frustrated of parenthood; others offered themselves solely for the good of humanity. There were not lacking also those possessed by an itch for publicity; and as the years went on, many persons sought their livelihood by this means, since gradually one trade and industry after another ceased to exist. Makers of baby foods and clothing for infants went first, together with obstetricians and midwives; then, in order, followed all the occupations devoted to children and the young — kindergarten teachers, nursery school managers, writers of juvenile books, toymakers, and all the rest.

Long before the first child of the latest generation became nubile, it was dishearteningly obvious that the transformation caused by the 1955 accident was hereditary; for the last kittens and puppies grew up, came into heat, mated — but no offspring appeared. Young people were allowed and urged to marry as young as possible, and by 1975 millions of them had done so, all over the world. But no child was conceived.

By 1976, nobody on earth was less than twenty years old.

There were hardly any dogs and cats left on earth, and only a few old cows and horses. Rats, mice, and squirrels had long been gone, and with them some diseases, such as plague, typhus, and tularemia, had practically ceased to exist; the effects of the accident were not all maleficent. There were no schools of lower than college grade, and soon there would be no need for any except those for advanced study. Zoos were almost depopulated, most of their live exhibits having been replaced by cleverly stuffed and mounted animals. Hundreds of professions and occupations had ceased

to exist, either because they had catered to children or adolescents, or because they depended on animal industry. In many — though far from all — cases those trained in these fields were able to make adaptations; pediatricians, for example, became specialists in geriatrics; plastics took the place of leather or furs, though surviving specimens of these vanishing commodities became far more valuable than pearls or diamonds. Dairy farmers and their subsidiaries were hard hit, since there was no more milk, butter, or cheese. Butchers and cattle ranchers were out of a job; there was no more beef, pork, or lamb, and people lived entirely on chickens and other fowl, fish, vegetables, and fruit.

Even the most overpopulated portions of the globe were beginning to look empty, as the older inhabitants died off. This was least apparent in such places as India, partly because of the removal of tigers and other predatory animals. However, the huge increase in cobras now that there were no mongooses almost balanced that slight advantage. In Europe and America, and in the Antipodes, the lowering of the population was easily observable. Ironically enough, the human race in dying became also healthier than it had ever been. There was enough food for everybody now, even the poorest; moreover, the imminence of universal extinction gave sharp impetus to medical research. If a man could no longer hope to survive in his descendants, then at least he wanted to stay alive as long as possible. (The earlier suicide wave had dropped to almost nothing.) On the other hand, the impossibility of handing on property beyond the next generation killed the urge toward accumulation of great wealth, and rich men quite willingly allowed themselves to be taxed of nearly all their fortunes for the benefit of the general public.

On April 16, 1976, Ingrid Anderson, the youngest human being on earth, celebrated her twentieth birthday.

By pure chance, this girl had become a symbol. It was on this date that the World Government formally established four research commissions, with quarters in Shanghai, Chicago, Paris, and Moscow, for a final intensive effort to discover a way to reverse the disaster of May 11, 1955. They became known as the Ingrid Anderson Research Commissions — popularly known as IARC.

IARC had a specified life-span of twenty years. When the youngest woman on earth was forty, she might still, in the old days, be quite capable

of child-bearing for several years to come; but it was unlikely that if the scientists discovered a means of reinducing human fertility, enough women in their forties would conceive for the first time to repopulate the earth and preserve our intricate industrial civilization.

Nearly all the most eminent scientists alive were workers in IARC. Their salaries were munificent, their facilities unlimited. At first they were all members of the generation alive in 1955; gradually young people from what was (rather hopelessly) universally known as the Last Generation joined the staffs. After 1985 most of the men and women who had been active scientific workers thirty years before had grown old, resigned, or died. At that date the average age of IARC was 42.5.

The four sections of IARC communicated daily with one another by television-phone and teletype, besides which the chiefs of staff held frequent conferences in one or another of the headquarters cities, since by this time every part of the earth was within five hours of every other part by rocket plane. The language they employed was Esperanto. When the World Government, now permanently located in San Francisco, celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the first United Nations Conference for International Organization, in 1985, the directors of IARC were the principal guests of honor.

But in spite of great genius, terrific industry, and limitless facilities, none of their lines of investigation and experiment had proved successful.

It was understood, of course, that no announcement would ever be made unless it was the one great announcement for which a sick and terrified humanity waited. IARC was heavily guarded; no leaks ever seeped out to cause panic or frantic hope. And the years went on, and still IARC was silent.

In 1993, the youngest people in the world were thirty-seven years old. There was no youth left on earth, and very little laughter. A realization even more dreadful than humanity's extinction itself had seized the Last Generation: for the first time its members were brought face to face with the horrifying probabilities of their future. Unless IARC could work a seeming miracle, inevitably the time would come when all living men and women would be at least seventy years old, then eighty, then ninety, then a hundred or more. How could civilization be maintained by a handful of feeble old people? What of the day when in all the world, with its machines still

and its great cities falling to ruins, there would be only half a dozen centenarians?

As the dreadful possibilities grew more clear, two parallel waves struck the Last Generation, affecting particularly those in the most advanced centers of culture — a wave of religious mysticism, drowning fear and horror in a dream; and a colossal wave of suicides, far greater than that at the beginning of the era.

Mankind as a whole began to divide roughly into three categories: those who had given way to despair and terror, who lived only to escape from reality, either by the feverish pursuit of pleasure, the ecstasy of mysticism, or the desperate gate of suicide; those too bovine and inert, too unimaginative, to face the future; and those who still had faith in IARC.

On August 21, 1993, a special meeting of the chiefs of staff of IARC was called in the Paris headquarters.

IARC was strictly international; its staffs were of all peoples, and it was seldom that anyone was attached to a headquarters situated in his own country. The chief of the Shanghai IARC was an American Negro, Arthur Ramsdell. The Chicago chief was Joseph Callahan, whose father had been Irish, his mother a German Jewish refugee settled in Mexico. These represented the older generation — both had been boys in 1956. The other two were younger. The Moscow chief was a woman, Renée Loisy, who despite her French name had also English and Russian blood. The Paris chief was Chinese; his name was Liu Chen-ping.

All of those attending the conference, and indeed all the more responsible members of their staffs as well, knew why the meeting had been called. It was a crucial conference — the most crucial IARC had ever held.

"Loisy is ready to make her report," said Callahan.

"Fellow-workers," said Renée Loisy, without preliminaries, "I have to announce that I am pregnant. The father of my child is my husband, Karel Batak, who as you know is also a member of our Moscow staff."

"I need not remind you that as this new line of investigation began to look more hopeful, I volunteered to be its subject, since by its very nature it might be fatally dangerous if unsuccessful, and we did not consider it right to allow anyone outside our ranks to undergo that peril. You will also remember that a year ago this council voted to permit Karel Batak to join me in the experiment."

"What seventeen years of research by means of radioactive waves, glandular therapy, serology, infra-red light treatment, and every other conceivable method has uniformly failed to accomplish, has at last been brought about by the simple but revolutionary means you all know — the means so brilliantly suggested in 1991 by our colleague, Arthur Ramsdell."

She paused. Modestly Ramsdell waved away a respectful murmur.

"What has succeeded with Batak and me will undoubtedly succeed with every healthy man and woman of proper age," Loisy went on. "There remains now only to plan making our announcement to the world in such a way as to avoid undue excitement and confusion, and then to make our final report to the World Government and to dissolve IARC."

"The human race has been saved from extinction!"

For a minute there was an awed silence. It was interrupted by Liu Chencing.

"One moment," he said in his soft voice. "I think there is more than that for us to determine."

"What, then?" asked Joseph Callahan.

"I ask you to hear me out before you comment on what I am going to say," Liu continued. "To some — perhaps to all — of you it will seem monstrous. But I should be lacking in my duty to my conscience if I did not speak.

"What I want you to consider, straightforwardly and solemnly, is whether it is after all desirable to preserve the species to which we belong.

"I can see your horror at my words. But increasingly, for fourteen years, I have had before my mind's eye a contrast — a contrast between the world as it was in 1955, and the world as it is today.

"I was not born in 1955. But I have read — read not only the literature of before that date, but also the innumerable works on history, economics, and politics published since. I have, I think, as keen a grasp on the realization of the past as has the oldest man or woman alive.

"In the half-century preceding 1955, the whole globe had twice been ravaged by a devastating total war, and a third such war was imminent. Today there is no war.

"In 1955 the world was divided among more than a hundred sovereign nationalities, each jealous of its borders and its prerogatives. Today we have a universal World Government, democratically elected and conducted,

and with full and beneficent authority over every human being on earth.

"In 1955 mass starvation and famine, and disastrous economic depressions, were endemic. Today everyone in the world is well fed, well clothed, well housed, well educated.

"I need not mention other aspects of the situation — the prevalence of crime in 1955, its virtual absence today; the treatment of alien races and nationalities by peoples numerically superior to them; the relative position of the sexes then and now.

"Re-people the world, and how can we guarantee that we are not thereby bringing back all the evils which in 1955 made life hardly worth the living to at least a large minority of its inhabitants?

"You will say, I know, that even this is better than extinction of the human race. All I ask you to consider now, deeply and soberly, is: is it?"

His voice dropped. Callahan was the first to speak.

"I am sure," he said, "that all of us have known these doubts. Nevertheless I am not in agreement with Liu.

"The contrast he has drawn is true and painful. But the worst he foresees is still only a possibility. There is the other possibility that this hard experience has taught humanity a lesson — that the human race may never, especially since its first new members will be guided by us of this generation, go back to the bad old days.

"And there is another and vitally important matter which I think we have forgotten. Loisy is to have a child —"

"If Liu's voice carries," said Renée Loisy in a low murmur, "I agree that that child can never be born. The first child to be conceived since 1955 will also be the last child to be conceived, forever."

"That too, Loisy," Callahan continued. "But I was thinking of something else. We must face facts. A complete and radical variation in evolution such as overtook all mammals thirty-eight years ago is a revolutionary thing. It is not simple and unconnected; it must have infinite ramifications and repercussions.

"How do we know that a re-reversal such as we have brought about by Ramsdell's method will not be equally complex? To put it baldly, how do we know that the children born henceforth will be physically and mentally normal? The answer is that we do not know. We have no way, short of waiting to see, to find out how far heredity itself has been altered by this twofold

wrench at its foundations. We should have to proceed blindly with our experiment.

"As I said, I am, in spite of everything, opposed to Liu's opinion. But if we override his proposal, then I am in favor of keeping our secret not only until after Loisy's child has been born, but until enough other children have been born (probably, for the sake of secrecy, to other members of our staffs) to be sure that they are healthy, sound creatures. In other words, I recommend that we reserve our announcement for the date when, in any case, we must disband — April 16, 1996.

"Ramsdell, what is your feeling on this matter?"

Arthur Ramsdell's deep voice spoke hesitantly.

"It may be because I come from a race with a deep biological instinct," he said slowly, "but I cannot agree with Liu. I hope you will believe that it is not because by chance I hit on the method which finally solved our problem. I feel merely that life itself is sacred and desirable, at all costs and at all risks. For myself, I would rather be a Negro child born in America in 1940, as I was — with all that that implies — than never to have been born at all.

"I want to say, though, that if the majority opinion is against me, you can count on me loyally and faithfully to obey; and I know we can all say that of ourselves and of those members of our staffs who have even a glimpse of precisely what our recent work has been. In that case, we shall have to suppress permanently our latest researches, and announce on April 16, 1996, that we have failed. I suggest that if we decide to do this, we devote the remaining two years and eight months of our existence to the solving of another problem — a date and a means for euthanasia of the last remnants of our species. The fate of a few old people, waiting only to die of hunger and neglect, is too horrible for any civilized person to contemplate.

"However, I think the person most concerned in this decision is the one who has not yet spoken — Loisy. I believe hers should be the deciding voice."

"I do not concur in that," said Renée Loisy promptly. "Ours is a democratic body; the majority must decide. Indeed, I do not think we as chiefs of staff have the right to determine our stand without consultation of our colleagues. My recommendation is that we place the entire question before a general meeting of IARC — probably to be held in Chicago, since our largest hall is in that city. We need not, if you think it undesirable, give

them the exact details of our successful experiment. But IARC has for seventeen years been the most important body on earth. Every person connected with it is an eminent scientist in some field. Only a vote of the entire membership, together with a pledge of secrecy, which I am certain every one of them will keep, should determine whether humanity is to live or to die. I do not suggest that the matter should be put to a vote of all the people on earth; I do not, and I know you do not, think that a valid opinion could be obtained except from people fully informed and, because of their lifelong scientific preoccupations, emotionally aloof — or at least relatively so. But my unchangeable belief is that only IARC as a whole should decide."

Renée Loisy's proposal was adopted, and the meeting was held as arranged. Liu, Ramsdell, and Karel Batak were the principal speakers, Batak siding with Ramsdell. Many other of the world's most famous biophysicists and biologists also spoke, together with several noted historians and economists whom the chiefs of staff had invited under special pledges of necessity and secrecy. World Government guards insured the complete privacy of the meeting, which lasted for an entire week. Groups of IARC members discussed and debated day and night.

Finally, on September 3, 1993, the vote was cast. The ballots bore only two words, with a square after each for a registry by the voting-machines. The words were "Life" and "Death."

On the morning of September 4, 1993, which was a Sunday, the members of IARC gathered, in silent solemnity, to hear the results of their vote. Over the soundproof hall a religious hush prevailed as Joseph Callahan, chief of staff of their host city, stood before the microphone.

"Comrades of IARC," he said, "yesterday you cast 820 ballots. Previously you — or rather, I should say we — had all agreed that whatever the vote, the minority would obey it, and that if it were for the action recommended by Liu, each of us would forever keep the secret of the actual success of our researches, however strongly he or she might feel opposed to the decision.

"Fellow-scientists, fellow men and women, the fate of the human race has been decided. By your ballots you determined whether mankind was to live or to die. I shall now read the vote."

What was the decision?

I cannot tell you. As I write, it is not yet 1993.

There are certain sober-sided characters at large in this country who will undoubtedly denounce you for reading this magazine. "It is an escape mechanism," they will assure you earnestly; "you are flying from the world of reality." And when you have flown from their clutches into the nearest bar, you may begin to think it a pity that "escape mechanism" is merely a bit of oracular jargon in a world which does at times seem to demand some more practical mechanism of escape. Ten years ago in "Argosy" Robert Arthur answered your brooding by developing the perfect mechanism. Mr. Arthur is best known for his work on such radio chillers as The Mysterious Traveler and Murder by Experts; but here you may learn what an enviably deft touch he has with the lighter type of fantasy . . . and may well spend the rest of your days prowling around stamp dealers' shops in quest of the unique issue of the Federated States of El Dorado, by which you too can travel postpaid to paradise.

Postpaid to Paradise

by ROBERT ARTHUR

IT WAS Hobby Week at the Club, and Malcolm was displaying his stamp collection.

"Now take these triangulares," he said. "Their value is not definitely known, since they've never been sold as a unit. But they make up the rarest and most interesting complete set known to philatelists. They —"

"I once had a set of stamps that was even rarer and more interesting," Murchison Morks interrupted, his voice melancholy. Morks is a small, wispy man who usually sits by the fireplace and smokes his pipe, silently contemplating the coals. I do not believe he particularly cares for Malcolm, who is our only millionaire and likes what he owns to be better than what anybody else owns.

"You own a set of stamps *rarer* than my triangulares?" Malcolm asked incredulously, a dark tinge of annoyance creeping into his ruddy cheeks.

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"Not own, no." Morks shook his head in gentle correction. "Owned."
"Oh!" Malcolm snorted. "I suppose they got burned? Or stolen?"
"No" — and Morks uttered a sigh — "I used them. For postage, I mean. Before I realized their utter uniqueness."

Malcolm gnawed at his lip.

"This set of stamps," he said with great positiveness, laying a possessive hand on the glass covering the triangular bits of paper, "cost the life of at least one man."

"Mine," Morks replied, "cost me my best friend."

"Cost you the *life* of your best friend?" Malcolm demanded.

Morks shook his head, his face expressing a reflective sadness, as if in his mind he were living again a bit of the past that it still hurt him to remember.

"I don't know," he answered the philatelist. "I really don't. I suspect not. I honestly think that Harry Norris — that was my friend — at this moment is a dozen times happier than any man here. And when I reflect that but for a bit of timidity on my part I might be with him —

"But I had better tell you the whole story," he said more briskly, "so you can fully understand."

I am not a stamp collector myself [he began, with a pleasant nod toward Malcolm] but my father was. He died some years ago, and among other things he left me his collection.

It was not a particularly good one — he had leaned more toward pictur-esque ness in his items than toward rarity or value — and when I sold it, I hardly got enough for it to repay me for the trouble I went to in having it appraised.

I even thought for a time of keeping it; for some of his collection, particularly those stamps from tropical countries that featured exotic birds and beasts, were highly decorative.

But in the end I sold them all — except one set of five which the dealer refused to take, because he said they were forgeries.

Forgeries! If he had only guessed —

But naturally I took his word for it. I assumed he knew. Especially since the five stamps differed considerably from any I had ever seen before, and had not even been pasted into my father's album. Instead, they had been loose in an envelope tucked in at the rear of the book.

But forgeries or not, they were both interesting and attractive. The

five were in differing denominations: ten cents, fifty cents, one dollar, three dollars, and five dollars.

All were unused, in mint condition — that's the term, isn't it, Malcolm? — and in the gayest of colors: vermillion and ultramarine, emerald and yellow, orange and azure, chocolate and ivory, black and gold.

And since they were all large — their size was roughly four times that of the current air mail stamps, with which you are all familiar — the scenes they showed had great vividness and reality.

In particular the three-dollar one, portraying the native girl with the platter of fruit on her head —

However, that's getting ahead of my story. Let me say simply that, thinking they were forgeries, I put them away in my desk and forgot about them.

I found them again one night, quite by accident, when I was rummaging around in the back of a drawer, looking for an envelope in which to post a letter I had just written to my best friend, Harry Norris. Harry was at that time living in Boston.

It so happened that the only envelope I could find was the one in which I had been keeping those stamps of my father's. I emptied them out, addressed the envelope, and then, after I had sealed the letter inside, found my attention attracted to those five strange stamps.

I have mentioned that they were all large and rectangular: almost the size of baggage labels, rather than of conventional postage stamps. But then, of course, these were not conventional postage stamps.

Across the top of them was a line in bold print; FEDERATED STATES OF EL DORADO. Then, on either side, about the center, the denomination. And at the bottom, another line, *Rapid post*.

Being unfamiliar with such things, I had assumed when first I found them that El Dorado was one of these small Indian states, or perhaps it was in Central America some place. Rapid Post, I judged, would probably correspond to our own air mail.

Since the denominations were in cents and dollars, I rather leaned to the Latin America theory: there are a lot of little countries down there that I'm always getting confused, like San Salvador and Columbia. But until that moment I had never really given the matter much thought.

Now, staring at them, I began to wonder whether that dealer had known his business. They were done so well, the engraving executed with such

superb verve, the colors so bold and attractive, that it hardly seemed likely any forger could have gotten them up.

It is true the subjects they depicted were far from usual. The ten-cent value, for instance, pictured a unicorn standing erect, head up, spiral horn pointing skyward, mane flowing, the very breathing image of life.

It was almost impossible to look at it without *knowing* that the artist had worked with a real unicorn for a model. Except, of course, that there aren't any unicorns any more.

The fifty-cent showed Neptune, trident held aloft, riding a pair of harnessed dolphins through a foaming surf. It was just as real as the first.

The one-dollar value depicted Pan playing on his pipes, with a Greek temple in the background, and three fauns dancing on the grass. Looking at it, I could almost hear the music he was making.

I'm not exaggerating in the least. I must admit I was a little puzzled that a tropical country should be putting Pan on one of its stamps, for I thought he was purely a Greek monopoly. But when I moved on to the three-dollar stamp, I forgot all about him.

I probably can't put into words quite the impression that stamp made upon me — and upon Harry Norris, later.

The central figure was a girl; I believe I spoke of that.

A native girl, against a background of tropical flowers. A girl of about sixteen, I should say, just blossomed into womanhood, smiling a little secret smile that managed to combine the utter innocence of girlhood with all the inherited wisdom of a woman.

Or am I making myself clear? Not very? Well, no matter. Let it go at that. I'll only add that on her head, native fashion, she was carrying a great flat platter piled high with fruit of every kind you can imagine; and that platter, together with some flowers at her feet, was her only attire.

I looked at her for quite a long time, before I examined the last of the set — the five-dollar value.

This one was relatively uninteresting, by comparison — just a map. It showed several small islands set down in an expanse of water labeled, in neat letters, *Sea of El Dorado*. I assumed that the islands represented the Federated States of El Dorado itself, and that the little dot on the largest, marked by the word Nirvana, was the capital of the country.

Then an idea occurred to me. Harry had a nephew who collected stamps.

Just for the fun of it, I might put one of those El Dorado forgeries — if they were forgeries — on my letter to Harry, along with the regular stamp, and see whether it wouldn't go through the post office. If it did, Harry's nephew might get a rarity, a foreign stamp with an American cancelation.

It was a silly idea, but it was late at night and finding the stamps had put me in a gay mood. I promptly licked the ten-cent El Dorado, pasted it onto the corner of Harry's letter, and then got up to hunt a regulation stamp to put with it.

The search took me into my bedroom, where I found the necessary postage in the wallet I had left in my coat. While I was gone, I left the letter itself lying in plain sight on my desk.

And when I got back into the library, the letter was gone.

I don't need to say I was puzzled. There wasn't any place it could have gone to. There wasn't anybody who could have taken it. The window was open, but it was a penthouse window overlooking twenty floors of empty space, and nobody had come in through it.

Nor was there any breeze that might have blown the envelope to the floor. I looked. In fact, I looked everywhere, growing steadily more puzzled.

And then, as I was about to give up, my phone began ringing.

It was Harry Norris, calling me from Boston. His voice, as he said hello, was a little strained. I quickly found out why.

Three minutes before, as he was getting ready for bed, the letter I had just finished giving up for lost had come swooping in his window, hung for a moment in midair as he stared at it, and then fluttered to the floor.

The next afternoon, Harry Norris arrived in New York. I had promised him over the phone, after explaining about the El Dorado stamp on the letter, not to touch the others except to put them safely away.

It was obvious that the stamp was responsible for what had happened. In some manner it had carried that letter from my library straight to Harry Norris' feet in an estimated time of three minutes, or at an average rate of approximately five thousand miles an hour.

It was a thought to stagger the imagination. Certainly it staggered mine.

Harry arrived just at lunch time, and over lunch I told him all I knew; just what I've told you now. He was disappointed at the meagreness of my information. But I couldn't add a thing to the facts we already knew, and those facts spoke for themselves.

Basically, they reduced to this: I had put the El Dorado stamp on Harry's letter, and promptly that letter had delivered itself to him with no intermediary processes whatever.

"No, that's not quite right!" Harry burst out. "Look. I brought the letter with me. And—"

He held it out to me, and I saw I had been wrong. There *had* been an intermediary process of some kind, for the stamp was canceled. Yes, and the envelope was postmarked, too, in a clearly legible, pale purple ink.

Federated States of El Dorado, the postmark said. It was circular, like our own; and in the center of the circle, where the time of cancelation usually is, was just the word *Thursday*.

"Today is Thursday," Harry remarked. "It was after midnight when you put the stamp on the letter?"

"Just after," I told him. "Seems queer these El Dorado people pay no attention to the hour and the minute, doesn't it?"

"Only proves they're a tropical country," Harry suggested. "Time means little or nothing in the tropics, you know. But what I was getting at, the Thursday postmark goes to show El Dorado is probably down in Central America, as you suggested. If it were in India, or the Orient, it would have been marked Wednesday, wouldn't it? On account of the time difference?"

"Or would it have been Friday?" I asked, rather doubtfully, not knowing much about those things. "In any case we can find out easily enough. We've just to look in the Atlas. I don't know why I didn't think of it before."

Harry brightened.

"Of course," he said. "Where do you keep yours?"

But it turned out I hadn't any Atlas in the house — not even a small one. So we phoned downtown to one of the big bookstores to send up their latest and largest Atlas. And while we waited for it we examined the letter again and speculated upon the method by which it had been transmitted.

"Rapid post!" Harry explained. "I should say so! It beats air mail all hollow. Why, if that letter not only traveled from here to Boston between the time you missed it and it fell at my feet, but actually went all the way to Central America, was canceled and postmarked, and *then* went on to Boston, its average speed must have been —"

We did a little rough calculation and hit upon two thousand miles a minute as a probable speed. When we'd done that, we looked at each other.

"Good Lord!" Harry gasped. "The Federated States of El Dorado may be a tropical country, but they've really hit upon something new in this thing! I wonder why we haven't heard about it before?"

"May be keeping it a secret," I suggested. "No, that won't do, because I've had the stamps for several years, and of course, my father had them before that."

"I tell you, there's something queer here," Harry suggested, darkly. "Where are those others you told me about? I think we ought to make a few tests with them while we're waiting for that *Atlas*."

With that I brought out the four remaining unused stamps, and handed them to him. Now Harry, among other things, was a rather good artist; and his whistle at the workmanship was appreciative. He examined each with care, but it was — I'd thought it would be — the three-dollar value that really caught his eye. The one with the native girl on it, you remember.

"Lord!" Harry said aloud. "What a beauty!"

Presently, however, Harry put that one aside and finished examining the others. Then he turned to me.

"The thing I can't get over," he commented, "is the *lifelikeness* of the figures. You know what I'd suspect if I didn't know better? I'd suspect these stamps were never engraved at all. I'd believe that the plates they came from were prepared from photographs."

"From photographs!" I exclaimed; and Harry nodded.

"Of course, you know and I know they can't have been," he added. "Unicorns and Neptunes and Pans aren't running around to be photographed, these days. But that's the feeling they give me."

I confessed that I had had the same feeling. But since we both agreed on the impossibility of its being so, we dismissed that phase of the matter and went back again to the problem of the method used in transporting the letter.

"You say you were out of the room when it vanished," Harry remarked. "That means you didn't see it go. You don't actually know what happened when you put that stamp on and turned your back, do you?"

I agreed that was so, and Harry sat in thoughtful silence.

At last he looked up.

"I think," he said, "we ought to find out by using one of these other stamps to mail something with."

Why that hadn't occurred to me before I can't imagine. As soon as Harry said it, I recognized the rightness of the idea. The only thing was to decide what to send, and to whom.

That held us up for several minutes. There wasn't anybody else either of us cared to know about this just now; and we couldn't send anything to each other very well, being both there together.

"I'll tell you!" Harry exclaimed at last. "We'll send something to El Dorado itself!"

I agreed to that readily enough, but how it came about that we decided to send, not a letter, but Thomas à Becket, my aged and ailing Siamese cat, I can't remember.

I do know that I told myself it would be a kind way to dispose of the creature. Transmission through space at the terrific velocity of one hundred and twenty thousand miles an hour would surely put him out of his sufferings, quickly and painlessly.

Thomas à Becket was asleep under the couch, breathing asthmatically and with difficulty. I found a cardboard box the right size and we punched some air holes in it. Then I gathered up Thomas and placed him in the container. He opened rheumy old eyes, gazed at me vaguely, and relapsed into slumber again. With a pang I put the lid on and we tied the box.

"Now," Harry said thoughtfully, "there's the question of how to address him, of course. However, any address will do for our purpose."

He took up a pen and wrote with rapidity. *Mr. Henry Smith, 711 Elysian Fields Avenue, Nirvana, Federated States of El Dorado.* And beneath that he added, *Perishable! Handle With Care!*

"But—" I began. Harry cut me off.

"No," he said, "of course I don't know of any such address. I just made it up. But the post office people won't know that, will they?"

"But what will happen when—" I began again, and again he had had the answer before I'd finished the question.

"It'll go to the dead letter office, I expect," he told me. "And if he is dead, they'll dispose of him. If he's alive, I've no doubt they'll take good care of him. From the stamps I've gotten a notion living is easy there."

That silenced my questions, and Harry picked up a stamp — the fifty-cent value — licked it, and placed it firmly on the box. Then he withdrew his hand and stepped back beside me.

Intently, we watched the parcel.

For a moment, nothing whatever happened.

And then, just as disappointment was gathering on Harry Norris' countenance, the box holding Thomas à Becket rose slowly into the air, turned like a compass needle, and began to drift with increasing speed toward the open window.

By the time it reached the window, it was moving with race-horse velocity. It shot through and into the open. We rushed to the window and saw it moving upward in a westerly direction, above the Manhattan skyline.

And then, as we stared, it began to be vague in outline, misty; and an instant later had vanished entirely. Because of its speed, I suggested, the same way a rifle bullet is invisible.

But Harry had another idea. He shook his head as we stepped back toward the center of the room.

"No," he began, "I don't think that's the answer. I have a notion —"

What his notion was I never did find out. Because just then he stopped speaking, with his mouth still open, and I saw him stiffen. He was looking past me, and I turned to see what had affected him so.

Outside the window was the package we had just seen vanish. It hung there for a moment, then moved slowly into the room, gave a little swoop, and settled lightly onto the table from which, not two minutes before, it had left.

Harry and I rushed over to it, and our eyes must have bugged out a bit.

Because the package was all properly canceled and postmarked, just as the letter had been. With the addition that across the corner, in large purple letters, somebody had stamped, *Return to Sender. No Such Person at this Address.*

"Well!" Harry said at last. It wasn't exactly adequate, but it was all either of us could think of. Then, inside the box, Thomas à Becket let out a squawl.

I cut the cords and lifted the lid. Thomas à Becket leaped out with an animation he had not shown in years.

There was no denying it. Instead of killing him, his trip to El Dorado, brief as it was, had done him good. He looked five years younger.

Harry Norris was turning the box over in his hands, perplexed.

"What I can't get over," he remarked, "is that there really *is* such an address as 711 Elysian Fields Avenue. I swear I just made it up."

"There's more to it than that," I reminded him. "The very fact that the package came back. We didn't put any return address on it."

"So we didn't," Harry agreed. "Yet they knew just where to return it, didn't they?"

He pondered for a moment longer. Then he put the box down.

"I'm beginning to think," he said, an odd expression on his face, "that there is more to this than we realize. A great deal more. I suspect the whole truth is a lot more exciting than we have any notion. As for this Federated States of El Dorado, I have a theory —"

But he didn't tell me what his theory was. Instead, that three-dollar chocolate-and-ivory stamp caught his eye again.

"Jove!" he whispered, more to himself than to me — he was given occasionally to these archaic ejaculations — "she's beautiful. Heavenly! With a model like that an artist might paint —"

"He might forget to paint, too," I put in. Harry nodded.—

"He might indeed," he agreed. "Though I think he'd be inspired in the end to work he'd never on earth have dreamed of doing, otherwise." His gaze at the stamp was almost hungry. "This girl," he declared, "is the one I've been waiting all my life to find. To meet her I'd give — I'd give — Well, almost anything."

"I'm afraid you'd have to go to El Dorado to do that," I suggested flippanently, and Harry started.

"So I would! And I'm perfectly willing to do it, too. Listen! These stamps suggest this El Dorado place must be rather fascinating. What do you say we both pay it a visit? We neither of us have any ties to keep us, and —"

"Go there just so you can meet the girl who was the model for that stamp?" I demanded.

"Why not? Can you think of a better reason?" he asked me. "I can give you more. For one thing, the climate. Look how much better the cat is. His little excursion took years off his age. Must be a highly healthful place. Maybe it'll make a young man of you again. And besides —"

But he didn't have to go on. I was already convinced.

"All right," I agreed. "We'll take the first boat. But when we get there, how will we —"

"By logic," Harry shot back. "Purely by logic. The girl must have posed for an artist, mustn't she? And the postmaster general of El Dorado must

know who the artist is, mustn't he? We'll go straight to the postmaster general. He'll direct us to the artist. The artist will give us her name and address. Could anything be simpler?"

I hadn't realized how easy it would be. Now some of his impatience was getting into my own blood.

"Maybe we won't have to take a boat," I suggested. "Maybe there's a plane service. That would save—"

"Boat!" Harry Norris snorted, stalking back and forth across the room and waving his hands. "Plane! You can take boats and planes if you want to. I've got a better idea. I'm going to El Dorado by mail!"

Until I saw how beautifully simple his idea was, I was a bit stunned. But he quickly pointed out that Thomas à Becket had made the trip, and come back, without injury. If a cat could do it, a man could.

There wasn't a thing in the way except the choice of a destination. It would be rather wasted effort to go, only to be sent back ignominiously for want of proper addressing.

"I have that figured out too," Harry told me promptly when I voiced the matter. "The first person I'd go to see anyway when I got there would be the postmaster general. *He* must exist, certainly. And mail addressed to him would be the easiest of all to deliver. So why not kill two birds with one stone by posting myself to his office?"

That answered all my objections. It was as sound and sensible a plan as I'd ever heard.

"Why," Harry Norris added with rising excitement, "I may be having dinner with the girl tonight! Wine and pomegranates beneath a gold-washed moon, with Pan piping in the shadows and nymphs dancing on the velvet green!"

"But"—I felt I had to prepare him for possible disappointment—"suppose she's married by now?"

He shook his head.

"She won't be. I have a feeling. Just a feeling. Now to settle the details. We've got three stamps left — nine dollars' worth altogether. That should be enough. I'm a bit lighter; you've been taking on weight lately, I see. Four dollars should carry me — the one and the three. That leaves the five-dollar for you.

"As for the address, we'll write that on tags and tie them to our wrists.

You have tags, haven't you? Yes, here's a couple in this drawer. Now give me that pen and ink. Something like this ought to do very well . . ."

He wrote, then held the tags out to me. They were just alike. *Office of the Postmaster General*, they said. *Nirvana, Federated States of El Dorado. Perishable. Handle With Care.*

"Now," he said, "we'll each tie one to our wrist . . ."

But I drew back. Somehow I couldn't quite nerve myself to it. Delightful as the prospects he had painted of the place, the idea of posting myself into the unknown, the way I had sent off Thomas à Becket, did something queer to me.

I told him I would join him. I would take the first boat, or plane, and meet him there, say at the principal hotel.

Harry was disappointed, but he was too impatient by now to argue.

"Well," he agreed, "all right. But if for any reason you can't get a boat or plane, you'll use that last stamp to join me?"

I promised faithfully that I would. With that he held out his right wrist and I tied a tag about it. Then he took up the one-dollar stamp, moistened it, and applied it to the tag. He had the three-dollar one in his hand when the doorbell rang.

"In a minute," he was saying, "or maybe in less, I shall probably be in the fairest land man's combined imagination has ever been able to picture."

"Wait!" I called, and hurried out to answer the bell. I don't know whether he heard me or not. He was just lifting that second stamp to his tongue to moisten it when I turned away, and that was the last I ever saw of him.

When I came back, with the package in my hands — the ring had been the messenger from the bookshop, with the atlas we had ordered — Harry Norris was gone.

Thomas à Becket was sitting up and staring toward the window. The curtains were still fluttering. I hurried over. But Norris was not in sight.

Well, I thought, he must have put on that stamp he had in his hand, not knowing I'd left the room. I could see him, in my mind's eye, that very moment being deposited on his feet in the office of an astonished postmaster general.

Then it occurred to me I might as well find out just where the Federated States of El Dorado were, after all. So I ripped the paper off the large volume the bookstore had sent and began to leaf through it.

When I had finished, I sat in silence for awhile. From time to time I glanced at that unused tag, and that uncanceled stamp still lying on my desk. Then I made my decision.

I got up and fetched Harry's bag. It was summer, luckily, and he had brought mostly light clothing. To it I added anything of mine I thought he might be able to use, including a carton of cigarettes, and pen and ink on the chance he might want to write me.

As an afterthought I added a small Bible — just in case.

Then I strapped the bag shut and affixed the tag to it. I wrote *Harry Norris* above the address, pasted that last El Dorado stamp to it, and waited.

In a moment the bag rose in the air, floated to the window, out, and began to speed away.

It would reach there, I figured, before Harry had had time to leave the postmaster general's office, and I hoped he might send me a postcard or something by way of acknowledgement. But he didn't. Perhaps he couldn't.

. . . At this point Morks stopped, as if he had finished his story. But unnoticed Malcolm had left our little group for a moment. Now he came pushing back into it with a large *Atlas-Gazeteer* in his hands.

"So that's what became of your set of rarities!" he said, with a scarcely veiled sneer. "Very interesting and entertaining. But there's one point I want to clear up. The stamps were issued by the Federated States of El Dorado, you say. Well, I've just been looking through this atlas, and there's no such place on earth."

Morks looked at him, his melancholy countenance calm.

"I know it," he said. "That's why, after glancing through my own atlas that day, I didn't keep my promise to Harry Norris and use that last stamp to join him. I'm sorry now. When I think of how Harry must be enjoying himself there —

"But it's no good regretting what I did or didn't do. I couldn't help it. The truth is that my nerve failed me, just for a moment then, when I discovered there *was* no such place as the Federated States of El Dorado — on earth, I mean."

And sadly he shook his head.

"I've often wished I knew where my father got those stamps," he murmured, almost to himself; then fell into a meditative silence.

It is difficult to classify the work of Ray Bradbury. There can be no question of his pre-eminence among our younger short story writers. He's the "young" master and that's that. But no two Bradbury fans (ourselves included) can agree on just what type of story Mr. Bradbury tells best. We think The Exiles gives a simple solution to the problem; he does everything well. Here we give you Bradbury humor, bitter, ironic, yet verging on the farcical; Bradbury fantasy-horror, in the macabre efforts of the Exiles to salvage some gloomy dregs of their sombre existence, and Bradbury science-fiction-satire, in his grim portrayal of a future earth, surgically aseptic, where men's minds have grown as sterile as the world in which they live. For years Mr. Bradbury has been writing about Mars, until his readers know that planet as well as the devotees of Sinclair Lewis know Zenith. This spring a unified and expanded volume of Bradbury Martiana will appear under the title THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES — a book that will undoubtedly be henceforth considered a keystone volume in any science-fiction library. But here is a Martian story not included in those chronicles — a tale from a different dimension of time and thought, a tale which deals at once warmly and chillingly with some of the greatest names in all fantasy — and serves to fix more securely than ever among those great names that of Ray Bradbury.

The Exiles

by RAY BRADBURY

THEIR EYES were fire and the breath flamed out the witches' mouths as they bent to probe the cauldron with greasy stick and bony finger.

"When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?"

They danced drunkenly on the shore of an empty sea, fouling the air with their three tongues and burning it with their cats' eyes malevolently aglitter:

"Round about the cauldron go;
In the poisoned entrails throw!

Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn and cauldron bubble!"

They paused and cast a glance about. "Where's the crystal? Where the needles?" "Here!" "Good!" "Is the yellow wax thickened?" "Yes!" "Pour it in the iron mould!" "Is the wax figure done?" They shaped it like molasses adrip on their green hands. "Shove the needle through the heart!" "The crystal, the crystal, fetch it from the tarot bag, dust it off, have a look!"

They bent to the crystal, their faces white.

"See, see, see"

A rocket ship moved through space from the planet Earth to the planet Mars. On the rocket ship, men were dying.

The captain raised his head, tiredly. "We'll have to use the morphine."

"But, captain"

"You see yourself this man's condition." The captain lifted the wool blanket and the man restrained beneath the wet sheet moved and groaned. The air was full of sulphurous thunder.

"I saw it, I saw it." The man opened his eyes and stared at the port where there were only black spaces, reeling stars, Earth far removed, and the planet Mars rising large and red. "I saw it, a bat, a huge thing, a bat with a man's face, spread over the front port. Fluttering and fluttering, fluttering and fluttering!"

"Pulse?" asked the captain.

The orderly measured it. "130."

"He can't go on with that. Use the morphine. Come along, Smith."

They moved away. Suddenly the floorplates were laced with bone and white skulls that screamed. The captain did not dare look down, and over the screaming he said, "Is this where Perse is?" turning in at a hatch.

A white-smocked surgeon stepped away from a body. "I just don't understand it."

"How did Perse die?"

"We don't know, captain. It wasn't his heart, his brain, or shock. He just — died."

The captain felt the doctor's wrist which changed to a hissing snake and bit him. The captain did not flinch. "Take care of yourself. You've a pulse, too."

The doctor nodded. "Perse complained of pains, needles, he said, in his

wrists and legs. Said he felt like wax, melting. He fell. I helped him up. He cried like a child. Said he had a silver needle in his heart. He died. Here he is. We can repeat the autopsy for you. Everything's physically normal."

"That's impossible. He died of *something*."

The captain walked to a port. He smelled of menthol and iodine and green soap on his polished and manicured hands. His white teeth were dentifriced, and his ears scoured to a pinkness, as were his cheeks. His uniform was the color of new salt, and his boots were black mirrors shining below him. His crisp crew-cut hair smelled of sharp alcohol. Even his breath was sharp and new and clean. There was no spot to him. He was a fresh instrument, honed and ready, still hot from the surgeon's oven.

The men with him were from the same mould. One expected huge brass keys spiraling slowly from their backs. They were expensive, talented, well-oiled toys, obedient and quick.

The captain watched the planet Mars grow very large in space.

"We'll be landing in an hour on that damned place. Smith? Did you see any bats, or have other nightmares?"

"Yes, sir. The month before our rocket took off from New York, sir. White rats biting my neck, drinking my blood. I didn't tell. I was afraid you wouldn't let me come on this trip."

"Never mind," sighed the captain, "I had dreams, too. In all of my fifty years I never had a dream until that week before we took off from Earth. And then, every night, I dreamed I was a white wolf. Caught on a snowy hill. Shot with a silver bullet. Buried with a stake in my heart." He moved his head toward Mars. "Do you think, Smith, *they* know we're coming?"

"We don't know if there *are* Martian people, sir."

"Don't we? They began frightening us off eight weeks ago, before we started. They killed Perse and Reynolds now. Yesterday, they made Greenville go blind. How? I don't know. Bats, needles, dreams, men dying for no reason. I'd call it witchcraft in another day. But this is the year 2120, Smith. We're rational men. This all can't be happening. But it is. Whoever they are, with their needles and their bats, they'll try to finish all of us." He swung about. "Smith, fetch those books from my file. I want them when we land."

Two hundred books were piled on the rocket deck.

"Thank you, Smith. Have you glanced at them? Think I'm insane?"

Perhaps. It's a crazy hunch. At that last moment, I ordered these books from the Historical Museum. Because of my dreams. Twenty nights I was stabbed, butchered, a screaming bat pinned to a surgical mat, a thing rotting underground in a black box; bad, wicked dreams. Our whole crew dreamed of witch-things and were-things, vampires and phantoms, things they *couldn't* know anything about. Why? Because books on such ghastly subjects were destroyed a century ago. By law. Forbidden for anyone to own the grisly volumes. These books you see here are the *last* copies, kept for historical purposes in the locked Museum vaults."

Smith bent to read the dusty titles:

"*Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, by Edgar Allan Poe. *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley. *The Turn of the Screw*, by Henry James. *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, by Washington Irving. *Rappacini's Daughter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, by Ambrose Bierce. *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll. *The Willows*, by Algernon Blackwood. *The Wizard of Oz*, by L. Frank Baum. *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, by H. P. Lovecraft. And more! Books by Walter De La Mare, Wakefield, Harvey, Wells, Asquith, Huxley, all forbidden authors. All burned in the same year that Halloween was outlawed and Christmas was banned! But, sir, what good are these to us on the rocket?"

"I don't know," sighed the captain, "yet."

The three hags lifted the crystal where the captain's image flickered, his tiny voice tinkling out of the glass:

"I don't know," sighed the captain, "yet."

The three witches glared redly into each other's faces.

"We haven't much time," said one.

"Better warn *Them* up at the House."

"They'll want to know about the books. It doesn't look good. That fool of a captain!"

"In an hour they'll land their rocket."

The three hags shuddered and blinked up at the Emerald City by the edge of the dry Martian sea. In its highest window, a small man held a blood-red drape aside. He watched the wastelands where the three witches fed their cauldron and shaped the waxes. Further along, ten thousand other

blue fires and laurel incenses, black tobacco smokes and fir-weeds, cinnamons and bone-dusts rose soft as moths through the Martian night. The man counted the angry, magical fires. Then, as the three witches stared, he turned. The crimson drape, released, fell, causing the distant portal to wink, like a yellow eye.

Mr. Edgar Allan Poe stood in the tower window, a faint vapor of spirits upon his breath. "Hecate's friends are busy tonight," he said, seeing the witches, far below.

A voice behind him said, "I saw Will Shakespeare at the shore, earlier, whipping them on. All along the sea, Shakespeare's army alone, tonight, numbers thousands: the three Witches, Oberon, Hamlet's father, Puck, all, all of them, thousands! Good Lord, a regular sea of people."

"Good William." Poe turned. He let the crimson drape fall shut. He stood for a moment to observe the raw stone room, the black-timbered table, the candle flame, the other man, Mr. Ambrose Bierce, sitting very idly there, lighting matches and watching them burn down, whistling under his breath, now and then laughing to himself.

"We'll have to tell Mr. Dickens now," said Mr. Poe. "We've put it off too long. It's a matter of hours. Will you go down to his home with me, Bierce?"

Bierce glanced up, merrily. "I've just been thinking, what'll happen to us?"

"If we can't kill the rocket men off, frighten them away; then we'll have to leave, of course. We'll go on to Jupiter, and when they come to Jupiter we'll go on to Saturn, and when they come to Saturn we'll go to Uranus, or Neptune, and then on out to Pluto . . ."

"Where then?"

Mr. Poe's face was weary, there were fire-coals remaining, fading, in his eyes, and a sad wildness in the way he talked, and a uselessness of his hands and the way his hair fell lankly over his amazing white brow. He was like a satan of some lost dark cause, a general arrived from a derelict invasion. His silky soft black moustache was worn away by his musing lips. He was so small that his brow seemed to float, vast and phosphorescent, by itself, in the dark room.

"We have the advantages of superior forms of travel," he said. "We can always hope for one of their atomic wars, dissolution, the dark ages come

again. The return of superstition. We could go back then to Earth, all of us, in one night." Mr. Poe's black eyes brooded under his round and illuminant brow. He gazed at the ceiling. "So they're coming to ruin *this* world, too? They won't leave *anything* undefiled, will they?"

"Does a wolf pack stop until it's killed its prey and eaten the guts? It should be quite a war. I shall sit on the sidelines and be the scorekeeper. So many Earth Men boiled in oil, so many *Mss. Found In Bottles* burnt, so many Earth Men stabbed with needles, so many *Red Deaths* put to flight by a battery of hypodermic syringes — ha!"

Poe swayed angrily, faintly drunk with wine. "What did we do? Be *with* us, Bierce, in the name of God; did we have a fair trial before a company of literary critics? No! Our books were plucked up by neat, sterile, surgeon's pliers, and flung into vats, to boil, to be killed of all their mortuary germs. Damn them all!"

"I find our situation amusing," said Bierce.

They were interrupted by a hysterical shout from the tower stair.

"Mr. Poe! Mr. Bierce!"

"Yes, yes, we're coming!" Poe and Bierce descended to find a man gasping against the stone passage wall.

"Have you heard the news!" he cried, immediately, clawing at them like a man about to fall over a cliff. "In an hour they'll land! They're bringing books with them, *old* books, the witches said! What're you doing in the tower at a time like this? Why aren't you acting?"

Poe said, "We're doing everything we can, Blackwood. You're new to all this. Come along, we're going to Mr. Charles Dickens' place . . ."

". . . to contemplate our doom, our black doom," said Mr. Bierce, with a wink.

On their way down the stairs they stopped at a heavy door and rapped. A door-plate read: *Mr. H. P. Lovecraft*, and a voice from behind it said, "Come in."

The door was blistering hot to the touch.

"Watch out for the draft!" said Lovecraft, wildly, as they entered and slammed the door. A shudder went through the gaunt frame of the man who sat in a fine antique chair, a quill pen in his thin hand, his coat collar tight up about his neck, his back to a thundering, crackling hearth-fire. The

room was so hellish that the candles were melted into tallowy pools. And the fire was so fiercely bright that it was like living in the sun. Lovecraft trembled his chilly hands out to the fire as if the brief opening of the door had let an arctic terror of wind at him. "We can not be too careful," he said. "There are drafts in castles like this. What is it?"

"Come along, we're going to talk to Dickens."

"No, no, I am sorry." Lovecraft hurried to a small icebox which somehow survived this red furnace and brought forth two quarts of ice-cream. Emptying these into a large dish he hurried back to his table and began alternately tasting the vanilla ice and scurrying his pen over crisp sheets of writing paper. As the ice-cream melted upon his tongue, a look of almost dreamful exultancy dissolved his face; then he sent his pen dashing. "Sorry. Really, I am awfully busy, gentlemen, Mr. Poe, Mr. Bierce. I have so many letters to write."

"But how can that be?" protested Bierce. "You haven't received any letters here."

"That means nothing." The writing man tried another delicate spoonful of the cold treasure. There were six empty vanilla ice-cream boxes piled neatly on the hearth from this day's feasting. And the ice-box, in the quick flash they had seen of its interior, contained a good dozen quarts more. "I am writing a letter to Mr. L. Frank Baum, I am quite sure that we shall enjoy a delightful correspondence, once started —"

"But this is *his* castle, the Emerald City, he lives right downstairs," said Poe.

"And then I have a letter I must write to Mr. Samuel Johnson, and Mr. Alexander Pope, and Mr. Machen, and Mr. Coppard, and a thousand others. I do not know when I shall finish. But I shall take the time to help you with Mr. Dickens, nevertheless."

"Will you?"

"Yes." Lovecraft dipped his quill. "I shall write him a letter about this crisis."

"Come on, Edgar," said Bierce, with a laugh.

Poe's eye fell upon a letter. "May I take this along?"

"Of course," said Lovecraft. "I wrote it to you, your name is on it, is it not?"

As they opened the door, Poe and Bierce had a last glimpse of Lovecraft

cowering from the cold draft, ice-cream in his terrified mouth, dripping pen in hand.

Bang! The door slammed.

"Remind me to send him a half ton of lobsters," said Poe.

Blackwood was waiting for them.

"Mr. L. Frank Baum was just here," he said. "He wants to see you, Mr. Poe. He's terribly shocked and nervous at the way you've taken over the Emerald City. He doesn't like the cobwebs and bats."

"Tell him to see me later!"

They moved down the echoing throats of the castle, level after dim green level, down into mustiness and decay and spiders and dreamlike webbing. "Don't worry," said Poe, his brow like a huge white lamp before them, descending, sinking. "All along the dead sea tonight I've called the Others. Your friends and mine, Blackwood, Bierce. They're all there. The animals and the old women and the tall men with the sharp white teeth. The traps are waiting, the pits, yes, and the pendulums. The Red Death." Here he laughed quietly. "Yes, even the Red Death. I never thought, no, I never thought the time would come when a thing like the Red Death would actually *be*. But they asked for it, and they shall have it!"

"But are we strong enough?" wondered Blackwood.

"How strong is strong? They won't be prepared for us, at least. They haven't the imagination. Those clean young rocket men with their antiseptic bloomers and fish-bowl helmets, with their new religion. About their necks, on gold chains, scalpels. Upon their heads, a diadem of microscopes. In their holy fingers, steaming incense urns which in reality are only germicidal ovens for steaming out superstition. The names of Poe, Bierce, Hawthorne, Blackwood blasphemy to their clean lips."

Outside the castle, they advanced through a watery space, a tarn that was not a tarn, which misted before them like the stuff of nightmares. The air filled with wing sounds and a whirring, a motion of winds and blacknesses. Voices changed, figures swayed at campfires. Mr. Poe watched the needles knitting, knitting, knitting, in the firelight, knitting pain and misery, knitting wickedness into wax marionettes, clay puppets. The cauldron smells of wild garlics and cayennes and saffron hissed up to fill the night with evil pungency.

"Get on with it!" said Poe. "I'll be back!"

All down the empty sea shore black figures spindled and waned, grew up and blew into black smokes on the sky. Bells rang in mountain towers and licorice ravens spilled out with the bronze sounds and spun away to ashes.

Over a lonely moor and into a small valley, Poe and Bierce hurried, and found themselves quite suddenly on a cobbled street, in cold, bleak, biting weather, with people stomping up and down stony courtyards to warm their feet; foggy withal, and candles flaring in the windows of offices and shops where hung the Yuletide turkeys. At a distance, some boys, all bundled up, snorting their pale breaths on the wintry air were trilling, "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen —" while the immense tones of a great clock continuously sounded midnight. Children dashed by from the baker's with dinners all asteam in their grubby fists, on trays and under silver bowls.

At a sign which read *Scrooge, Marley and Dickens*, Poe gave the Marley-faced knocker a rap, and from within, as the door popped open a few inches, a sudden gust of music almost swept them into a dance. And there, beyond the shoulder of the man who was sticking a trim-goatee and moustaches at them, was Mr. Fezziwig clapping his hands, and Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile, dancing and colliding with other merrymakers, while the fiddle chirped and laughter ran about a table like chandelier crystals given a sudden push of wind. The large table was heaped with brawn and turkey and holly and geese, with mince-pies, suckling-pigs, wreaths of sausages, oranges and apples, and there was Bob Cratchet and Little Dorrit and Tiny Tim and Mr. Fagin himself, and a man who looked as if he might be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato, who else but Mr. Marley, chains and all, while the wine poured and the brown turkeys did their excellent best to steam!

"What do you want?" demanded Mr. Charles Dickens.

"We've come to plead with you again, Charles; we need your help," said Poe.

"Help? Do you think I would help you fight against those good men coming in the rocket? I don't belong here, anyway. My books were burned by mistake. I'm no supernaturalist, no writer of horrors and terrors like you, Poe, you, Bierce, or the others. I'll have nothing to do with you terrible people!"

"You are a persuasive talker," reasoned Poe. "You could go to meet the rocket men, lull them, lull their suspicions, and then, then we would take care of them."

Mr. Dickens eyed the folds of the black cape which hid Poe's hands. From it, smiling, Mr. Poe drew forth a trowel.

"The Amontillado?" Mr. Dickens drew back.

"For *one* of our visitors." In his other hand now, Poe showed forth a cap and bells, which jingled softly and suggestively.

"And for the others?"

Poe smiled again, well pleased. "We finished digging the Pit this morning."

"And the Pendulum?"

"Is being installed."

"The Premature Burial?"

"That, too."

"You are a grim man, Mr. Poe."

"I am a frightened and an angry man. I am a God, Mr. Dickens, even as you are a God, even as we all are Gods, and our inventions, our people, if you wish, have not only been threatened, but banished and burned, torn up and censored, ruined and done away with. The worlds we created are falling into ruin. Even Gods must fight!"

"So." Mr. Dickens tilted his head, impatient to return to the party, the music, the food. "Perhaps you can explain why we are here? How did we come here?"

"War begets war. Destruction begets destruction. On Earth, a century ago, in the year 2067, they outlawed our books. Oh, what a horrible thing, to destroy our literary creations that way. It summoned us out of — what? Death? The Beyond? I don't like abstract things. I don't know. I only know that our worlds and our creations called us and we tried to save them and the only saving thing we could do was wait out the century here on Mars, hoping that Earth might overweight itself with these scientists and their doubttings; but now they're coming to clean us out of here, us and our dark things, and all the alchemists, witches, vampires, and were-things that, one by one, retreated across space as science made inroads through every country on Earth and finally left no alternative at all but exodus. You must help us. You have a good speaking manner. We need you."

"I repeat, I am not of you, I don't approve of you and the others," cried Dickens, angrily. "I was no player with witches and vampires, and midnight things."

"What of *A Christmas Carol*?"

"Ridiculous! One story. Oh, I wrote a few others about ghosts, perhaps, but what of that? My basic works had none of that nonsense!"

"Mistaken or not, they grouped you with us. They destroyed your books, your worlds, too. You *must* hate them, Mr. Dickens!"

"I admit they are stupid and rude, but that is all. Good day!"

"Let Mr. Marley come, at least!"

"No!"

The door slammed. As Poe turned away, down the street, skimming over the frosty ground, the coachman playing a lively air on a bugle, came a great coach, out of which, cherry-red, laughing and singing, piled the Pickwickians, banging on the door, shouting *Merry Christmas* good and loud, when the door was opened by the fat boy.

Mr. Poe hurried along the midnight shore of the dry sea. By fires and smokes he hesitated, to shout orders, to check the bubbling cauldrons, the poisons and the chalked pentagrams. "Good!" he said, and ran on. "Fine!" he shouted, and ran again. People joined and ran with him. Here were Mr. Coppard and Mr. Machen running with him now. And there were hating serpents and angry demons and fiery bronze dragons and spitting vipers and trembling witches like the barbs and nettles and thorns and all the vile flotsams and jetsams of the retreating sea of imagination, left on the melancholy shore, whining and frothing and spitting.

Mr. Machen stopped. He sat like a child on the cold sand. He began to sob. They tried to soothe him, but he would not listen. "I just thought," he said. "What happens to us on the day when the *last* copies of our books are destroyed?"

The air whirled.

"Don't speak of it!"

"We must," wailed Mr. Machen. "Now, now, as the rocket comes down, you Mr. Poe, you Coppard, you Bierce, all of you, grow faint. Like wood smoke. Blowing away. Your faces melt. . . ."

"Death. *Real* death for all of us."

"We exist only through Earth's sufferance. If a final edict tonight destroyed our last few works we'd be like lights put out."

Coppard brooded gently. "I wonder who I am. In what Earth mind tonight do I exist? In some African hut? Some hermit, reading my tales? Is he the lonely candle in the wind of time and science? The flickering orb sustaining me here in rebellious exile? Is it him? Or some boy in a discarded attic, finding me, only just in time! Oh, last night I felt ill, ill, ill to the marrows of me, for there is a body of the soul as well as a body of the body, and this soul-body ached in all of its glowing parts, and last night I felt myself a candle, guttering. When suddenly I sprang up, given new light! As some child in some yellow garret on Earth once more found a worn, time-specked copy of me, sneezing with dust! And so I'm given a short respite."

A door banged wide in a little hut by the shore. A thin short man, with flesh hanging from him in folds, stepped out and, paying no attention to the others, sat down and stared into his clenched fists.

"There's the one I'm sorry for," whispered Blackwood. "Look at him, dying away. He was once more real than we, who were men. They took him, a skeleton thought, and clothed him in centuries of pink flesh and snow-beard and red velvet suit and black boot, made him reindeers, tinsel, holly. And after centuries of manufacturing him they drowned him in a vat of Lysol, you might say."

The men were silent.

"What must it be on Earth?" wondered Poe, "without Christmas? No hot chestnuts, no tree, no ornaments or drums or candles, nothing; nothing but the snow and wind and the lonely, factual people . . ."

They all looked at the thin little old man with the scraggly beard and faded red velvet suit.

"Have you heard his story?"

"I can imagine it. The glitter-eyed psychologist, the clever sociologist, the resentful, froth-mouthed educationalist, the antiseptic parents . . ."

"A regrettable situation," said Bierce, smiling, "for the Yuletide merchants who, toward the last there, as I recall, were beginning to put up holly and sing *Noël* the day before Hallowe'en. With any luck at all, this year, they might have started on Labor Day!"

Bierce did not continue. He fell forward with a sigh. As he lay upon the

ground he had time to say only, "How interesting." And then as they all watched, horrified, his body burned into blue dust and charred bone, the ashes of which fled through the air in black tatters.

"Bierce, Bierce!"

"Gone."

"His last book gone. Someone, on Earth, just now burned it."

"God rest him, nothing of him left now. For what are we but books, and when those are gone, nothing's to be seen."

A rushing sound filled the sky.

They cried out, terrified, and looked up. In the sky, dazzling it with sizzling fire-clouds, was the Rocket! Around the men on the sea-shore, lanterns bobbed, there was a squealing and a bubbling and an odor of cooked spells. Candle-eyed pumpkins lifted into the cold clear air. Thin fingers clenched into fists and a witch screamed from her withered mouth:

"Ship, ship, break, fall!

Ship, ship, burn all!

Crack, flake, shake, melt!

Mummy-dust, cat-pelt!"

"Time to go," murmured Blackwood. "On to Jupiter, on to Saturn or Pluto."

"Run away?" shouted Poe in the wind. "Never!"

"I'm a tired old man."

Poe gazed into the old man's face and believed him. He climbed atop a huge boulder and faced the ten thousand gray shadows and green lights and yellow eyes on the hissing wind.

"The powders!" he shouted.

A thick hot smell of bitter almond, civit, cumin, wormseed and orris!

The rocket came down — steadily down, with the shriek of a damned spirit! Poe raged at it! He flung his fists up and the orchestra of heat and smell and hatred answered in symphony! Like stripped tree fragments, bats flew upward! Burning hearts, flung like missiles, burst in bloody fireworks on the singed air. Down, down, relentlessly down, like a Pendulum the rocket came! And Poe howled, furiously, and shrank back with every sweep and sweep of the rocket cutting and ravening the air! All the dead sea seemed a pit in which, trapped, they waited the sinking of the dread machinery, the glistening axe; they were people under the avalanche!

"The snakes!" screamed Poe.

And luminous serpentines of undulant green hurtled toward the rocket. But it came down, a sweep, a fire, a motion, and it lay panting out exhaustions of red plumage on the sand, a mile away.

"At it!" shrieked Poe. "The plan's changed! Only one chance! Run! At it! At it! Drown them with our bodies! Kill them!"

And as if he had commanded a violent sea to change its course, to suck itself free from primeval beds, the shirls and savage gouts of fire spread and ran like wind and rain and stark lightning over the sea-sands, down empty river deltas, shadowing and screaming, whistling and whining, sputtering and coalescing toward the rocket which, extinguished, lay like a clean metal torch in the furthest hollow. As if a great charred caldron of sparkling lava had been overturned, the boiling people and snapping animals churned down the dry fathoms!

"Kill them!" screamed Poe, running.

The rocket men leaped out of their ship, guns ready. They stalked about, sniffing the air like hounds. They saw nothing. They relaxed.

The captain stepped forth last. He gave sharp commands. Wood was gathered, kindled, and a fire leapt up in an instant. The captain beckoned his men into a half circle about him.

"A new world," he said, forcing himself to speak deliberately, though he glanced nervously, now and again, over his shoulder at the empty sea. "The old world left behind. A new start. What more symbolic than that we here dedicate ourselves all the more firmly to science and progress." He nodded crisply to his lieutenant. "The books."

Firelight limned the faded gilt titles: *The Willows*, *The Outsider*, *Behold*, *The Dreamer*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Land of Oz*, *Pellucidar*, *The Land That Time Forgot*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and the monstrous names of Machen and Edgar Allan Poe and Cabell and Dunsany and Blackwood and Lewis Carroll; the names, the old names, the evil names.

"A new world. With a gesture, we burn the last of the old."

The captain ripped pages from the books. Leaf by seared leaf, he fed them into the fire.

A scream!

Leaping back, the men stared beyond the firelight at the edges of the encroaching and uninhabited sea.

Another scream! A high and wailing thing, like the death of a dragon and the thrashing of a bronzed whale left gasping when the waters of a leviathan's sea drain down the shingles and evaporate.

It was the sound of air rushing in to fill a vacuum, where, a moment before, was *something*.

The captain neatly disposed of the last book into the fire.

The air stopped quivering.

Silence.

The rocket men leaned and listened.

"Captain, did you hear it?"

"No."

"Like a wave, sir. On the sea bottom! I thought I saw something. Over there. A black wave. Big. Running at us."

"You were mistaken."

"There, sir!"

"What?"

"See it? There! The City! Way over! That Green City, near the lake! It's splitting in half. It's falling!"

The men squinted and shuffled forward.

Smith stood trembling among them. He put his hand to his head as if to find a thought there. "I remember. Yes, now I do. A long time back. When I was a child. A book I read. A story. Oz, I think it was. Yes, Oz. The Emerald City of Oz . . . ?"

"Oz? Never heard of it."

"Yes, Oz, that's what it was. I saw it just now, like in the story. I saw it fall."

"Smith!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Report for psychoanalysis tomorrow."

"Yes, sir!" A brisk salute.

"Be careful."

The men tiptoed, guns alert, beyond the ship's aseptic light to gaze at the long sea and the low hills.

"Why," whispered Smith, disappointed, "there's no one here at all, is there? No one here at all."

The wind blew sand over his shoes, whining.

Is there anyone in the house who hasn't read at least twice THE PRISONER OF ZENDA? Or RUPERT OF HENTZAU? Or THE DOLLY DIALOGUES? Of course there isn't! So we shan't discuss those masterpieces of romantic adventure and drawingroom wit by Anthony Hope, but rather remind you that he also wrote fantasy. Which shouldn't surprise you, for surely THE PRISONER OF ZENDA is adult fantasy, a miracle world for romantics of all ages, where the impossible comes to pass in most convincing fashion. In SPORT ROYAL, a little book published in this country by Holt, New York, 1895, we found four fantasies, all delightful, and surprisingly modern in technique and treatment of theme. After much soul-searching we've chosen what is by a very slim margin the best. The Rajah is, perhaps, less anti-social (though no less cynically charming) than Rupert of Hentzau, but the astral body is as clumsily villainous as Black Michael ever was. And the whole story is told with the same pleasant, timeless irony that marks the chronicles of the lovely (and infuriating!) Dolly.

My Astral Body

by ANTHONY HOPE

"THERE'S NO DOUBT at all about it," said the rajah, relighting his cigar. "It's perfectly easy, if you know how to do it. The skepticism of the West is nothing less than disgusting."

The rajah had come to Oxford to complete his education and endue himself with the culture of Europe; and he sat in my rooms, in a frock-coat of perfect cut (he always wore a frock-coat), smoking one of my weeds and drinking a whisky-and-soda. The rajah took to European culture with avidity, and I have very little doubt that he learned many new things with which it might or might not be expedient to acquaint his fellow-countrymen and subjects when he returned to India. But all the intellectual interests of Oxford were not strong enough to wean him from his love for the ancient lore of his own country, and he was always ready to expound the hidden wisdom of the East to any inquiring spirit. As soon as I found this

out, I cultivated his acquaintance sedulously; for, in common with all intelligent men of the present day, I took a keen interest in that strange learning which seemed to give its possessors such extraordinary powers.

"Can you do it?" I asked.

"I should hope so," said the rajah contemptuously. "If I couldn't do that, I'd turn Mohammedan."

"I wish you'd teach me."

The rajah took in a deep puff of smoke. "You're sure you could manage it?" he asked.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Well, of course, like anything else, an astral body must be treated with tact, or it gets out of hand."

"Does it?"

"Why, yes; you must be firm and yet kind. Don't let it take liberties, or you don't know where it will land you. I rather doubt if I ought to show you."

I implored him to do so. I was young, rash, self-confident, and I thought I could manage an astral body as easily as I did the dean.

"Don't blame me if you find it too much for you, that's all," said the rajah. "And of course you must promise not to tell anyone."

"Oh, must I?"

"Yes, you must; because it's quite irregular in me to show you like this. You ought, by rights, you know, to go to Thibet for seven years."

"That would be rather a bore."

"Beastly," said the rajah; "but of course they insist on it, because they get the fees." He swore me to secrecy by all manner of oaths, and lastly on my word as a gentleman; and then he showed me.

At first it was very convenient. I always used to project it to chapel instead of going myself. It did capitally there, because it had only to behave itself and hold its tongue. At lectures it was a failure; it was such an inattentive beggar that its notes were worth nothing. And it was no sort of use in the Torpid; I was told that I should be turned out if I went on "sugaring" like that — there's no pluck or endurance in these Orientals. On the whole, however, I was very well satisfied with it, and came to rely upon it more and more for all the unpleasant duties of life.

"Well, how do you like it?" asked the rajah one day in Quad.

"My dear fellow, it's splendid," I answered. "It's up in town, being measured for trousers, now. You can't think how much trouble it saves."

The rajah smiled and shook his head.

"Be moderate," he said. "You mustn't use it too much, or it'll presume on it."

"Will it? What will it do?"

"Why, if it's always being projected, it's as likely as not it'll learn the trick of it, and take no projecting itself. Then you'll be left in the lurch."

"Well, I shan't grudge it a holiday now and then," I said magnanimously.

The rajah was right. It did begin to take French leave. Several times when I wanted it I found it had, without a word of apology, projected itself off to Iffley or somewhere, and was not available. I spoke very severely to it. It said nothing, but listened with an unpleasant sort of smile. "We all have our duties," I remarked, "and yours is to be here—" and I pointed to my chest — "when you are wanted. You're as bad as a scout."

"I ought to have a little relaxation," it answered sulkily.

"I never heard of such a thing in connection with you. Isn't it enough for you to meditate in four dimensions when you're not at work?"

"It's all very well in Tibet," it grumbled; "but a fellow doesn't come to Oxford to do that."

"One would think you had nothing to do with me. You seem to forget that you are simply a projection of mine."

We had some high words and parted — I mean, united — in very bad temper with one another. It was in the middle of a most impudent and positively threatening speech, when I terminated the interview by resuming it. It was very unreasonable and irritating, and I made up my mind to ask the rajah to speak to it the next morning. I had an engagement that evening, or I would have done it then. How I wish I had!

At half-past nine I went to an "At Home" at Professor Drayton's. As a rule, "At Homes" are dull; but I had a reason for going to this one. The professor had a very pretty daughter, and I was vain enough to think that my presence was welcome to her. In fact we were great friends, and I had not been at the house a quarter of an hour before I had forgotten all my worries with my unruly Astral Body, and was sitting by Bessie in the small drawing room, enjoying myself immensely. Suddenly — myster-

iously — I felt something like a violent push. Bessie vanished; the drawing room vanished; and I found myself in the High, standing in dripping rain, without a hat or coat. I stood still in bewilderment. What had happened? A moment later the proctor was upon me. I gave my name and college in a mechanical way, and he passed on, leaving me still standing in the rain. What had happened? Then I understood. It had projected me!

I woke up next morning, determined to have it out with it. I found, as I expected, that it had waited till I was asleep; then it slunk in and united without my knowing it. I went and paid my fine, and then, not waiting to breakfast, I proceeded to project it. It wouldn't move! I tried again and again. I had no more power over it than a child. I knew it was there; but I could not move it an inch. In wrath, I jumped up, seized my cap, and started for the rajah's rooms. The rogue saw what I was up to. I give you my word, I had not reached the door when it projected me most viciously, and I landed down in the Parks.

I had a fearful week of it. Of course, wherever I was, it could unite at once by just thinking of me; and, directly it had united, it used, I believe out of pure malice, to project me somewhere where I did not want to go. It was lucky for me that it was new to the business; its powers were as yet very undeveloped, and, consequently, it did not carry very far. If it could, I am sure it would have sent me to the Antipodes; but as it was, I never went further than the University boat-house — a pretty tidy step on a bad morning. Still, it was improving; and I felt that I must act at once if I did not want to be a permanent wanderer on the face of the earth.

My only chance was to engross its attention in some way, so that it would forget me for a little while, and leave me free to speak to the rajah. I pinned all my hopes on the rajah. Well, one morning, about a week after it first projected me, I went for a walk in Christchurch Meadow. We were united, and it had actually left me in peace ever since breakfast. I hoped its better feelings were beginning to get the mastery of it, and, in order to see, I tried to project it. No, it wouldn't move! The creature was still recalcitrant.

Suddenly I saw Bessie Drayton just in front of me. In delight at seeing her, I forgot about it, and, quickening my pace, overtook her, and lifted my hat. She smiled divinely, saying, "Why, Mr. Nares, I was just going to write —" At that moment, when I was listening to her sweet voice, it

projected me! Could ill-nature go further? But, luckily, its mind was not really concentrated on what it was doing. I believe it was thinking of Bessie, and consequently it only carried about a hundred yards. I landed behind one of the big elms, where I lay *perdu* till it had gone by. It and Bessie passed me together, and it was grinning from ear to ear, and looked as pleased as Punch.

I did not waste time in swearing. I ran like the wind back to college, hoping that Bessie's society would prevent it coming after me till I had spoken to the rajah. I still retained one pull over it. In order to unite, it had to come where I was; it could not resume me from a distance, as I used to resume it; so if it united now it would have to leave Bessie.

By a blessed chance, the rajah was at home, and in trembling haste I poured my story into his ear. He burst out laughing.

"I was afraid of it!" he gasped, holding his sides. "How splendid!"

"Do help me!" I urged. "It may unite at any moment, and project me the deuce knows where."

"Oh, it'll be all right with the young lady."

"Not for long. She's very particular, and won't let it walk far with her."

"Oh, then we must act. You don't feel it yet?"

"No; but do be quick!"

The rajah sported his oak, took off his coat, lay down on the floor, and went into strong convulsions.

I regretted putting him to so much trouble, but my need was urgent, and I knew that he was a good-natured man. Presently he cried:

"Are you there, Nani-Tal?"

"Certainly," said an old white-haired gentleman, dressed in a sheet, who sat in the rajah's armchair.

"That's all right," said the rajah, getting up and putting on his coat. "You were very difficult."

"We're so busy just now," said Nani-Tal apologetically. "I'm demonstrating three nights a week in New York, and preparations take all my time."

"You must tell him all about it," said the rajah to me; "he won't be very hard on us."

Nani-Tal was, however, rather severe. He said it was too bad of the rajah. How were they to live, if that sort of thing went on? Then he turned to me, and added, "Of course you couldn't manage it. If you'd gone through the

course, you would have been all right. But there, it's everything for nothing nowadays!"

"My friend couldn't go to Thibet."

"He might have paid the fees anyhow," grumbled Nani-Tal, "and taken correspondence lessons."

We smoothed him down with the promise of a handsome donation, and at last he consented to help us. It was only just in time, for at that very moment I felt my Astral Body uniting. A second later it made a violent effort to project me; of course, it saw Nani-Tal, and knew it was in for it. The old gentleman was too quick for it.

"Come out of that!" he cried imperiously, and the wretch stood in the middle of the room.

It did my heart good to hear Nani-Tal fall on the creature. After giving it no end of a lecture, he concluded, "And now, young man, you'll just go back to your jackal for a thousand years, and learn better manners."

The wretch protested; it asked for an elephant or even a tiger. Nani-Tal was obdurate.

"A jackal will just suit you," he said. "Be off!" The creature vanished. Simultaneously Nani-Tal began to disintegrate.

"Wait a bit!" cried the rajah.

"I can't. I'm summoned to St. James' Hall. There's a large audience, and the professor has been in convulsions seven minutes."

I tried to grasp his hand in thanks. "If you want another," he said, "you must go through the course — the full course. There's no other way. Let this be a lesson to you." And with this parting remark he disintegrated.

"It was wrong of me," said the rajah; "I won't do it again."

"It's a pity it turned out so badly," I remarked; "it was quite a comfort at first."

"They're all like that, unless you keep a tight hand on them. Shall you take the course?"

"Not I. I've had enough of it."

"Perhaps you're right. Excuse me; I have to go to the Deccan on business."

He fell back on the sofa, apparently in a trance, and I went off to the dean's lecture. It makes all the difference whether you know how to do a thing or not.

L. Sprague de Camp is (or has been) an engineer, lecturer, college instructor and author. Fletcher Pratt is (or has been) an historian (Napoleonic era, American Civil War), a critic, editor and translator. Viewed separately, they seem very orderly, if extraordinarily versatile, citizens. But combine the two, plus a typewriter, and an hilarious disorder ensues. Only Messrs. Pratt and de Camp, working as a team, would have the proper maladjustment to the ordinary for proper reporting of the events that occur regularly in Gavagan's Bar, down in Greenwich Village. (Sorry, we don't know the exact address.) Gavagan's is a decent place and its bartender, Mr. Cohan, is a capable enough judge of when a customer has had enough, but even he cannot maintain any order in life. Things just happen — things that shouldn't happen to a — well, an elephant, or a poetess. With these two stories, *Elephas Frumenti* and *The Gift of God*, begins the saga of Gavagan's Bar. More of the bewilderments that plague Mr. Cohan's clientele will be served up to you as Messrs. de Camp and Pratt report them to us.

Gavagan's Bar

by L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP and
FLETCHER PRATT

1. Elephas Frumenti

THE thin, balding man in tweeds almost tipped over his glass as he set it down with a care that showed care had become necessary. "Think of dogs," he said. "Really, my dear, there is no practical limit to what can be accomplished by selective breeding."

"Except that where I come from, we sometimes think of other things," said the brass-blonde, emphasizing the ancient *New Yorker* joke with a torso-wriggle that was pure *Police Gazette*.

Mr. Witherwax lifted his nose from the second Martini. "Do you know them, Mr. Co-han?" he asked.

Mr. Cohan turned in profile to swab a glass. "That would be Professor

Thott, and a very educated gentleman, too. I don't rightly know the name of the lady, though I think he has been calling her Elly, or something like that. Would you like to be meeting them, now?"

"Sure. I was reading in a book about this selective breeding, but I don't understand it so good, and maybe he could tell me something about it."

Mr. Cohan made his way to the end of the bar and led ponderously toward the table. "Pleased to meet you, Professor Thott," said Witherwax.

"Sir, the pleasure is all mine, all mine. Mrs. Jonas, may I present an old friend of mine, yclept Witherwax? Old in the sense that he is aged in the admirable liquids produced by Gavagan's, while the liquids themselves are aged in the wood, ha — ha — a third-premise aging. Sit down, Mr. Witherwax. I call your attention to the remarkable qualities of alcohol, among which *peripateia* is not the least."

"Yeah, that's right," said Mr. Witherwax, his expression taking on a resemblance to that of the stuffed owl over the bar. "What I was going to ask —"

"Sir, I perceive that I have employed a pedantry more suitable to the classroom, with the result that communication has not been established. *Peripateia* is the reversal of rôles. While in a state of saintly sobriety, I pursue Mrs. Jonas; I entice her to alcoholic diversions. But after the third Presidente, she pursues me, in accordance with the ancient biological rule that alcohol increases feminine desire while decreasing masculine potency."

Mr. Cohan from the bar appeared to have caught only a part of this speech. "Rolls we ain't got," he said. "but you can have some pretzel sticks." He reached under the bar for the bowl. "All gone; and I just laid out a new box this morning. That's where Gavagan's profits go."

"What I was going to ask —" said Witherwax.

Professor Thott stood up and bowed, a bow which ended in his sitting down again rather suddenly. "Ah, the mystery of the universe and music of the spheres, as Prospero might have phrased it! Who pursues? Who flies? The wicked. One preserves philosophy by remaining at the Platonian mean, the knife-edge between pursuit and flight, wickedness and virtue. Mr. Cohan, a round of Presidentes please, including one for my aged friend."

"Let me buy this one," said Witherwax, firmly. "What I was going to ask was about this selective breeding."

The professor shook himself, blinked twice, leaned back in his chair and

placed one hand on the table. "You wish me to be academic? Very well; but I have witnesses that it was at your own request."

Mrs. Jonas said: "Now look what you've done. You've got him started and he won't run down until he falls asleep."

"What I want to know—" began Witherwax, but Thott beamingly cut across: "I shall present only the briefest and most nontechnical of outlines," he said. "Let us suppose that of sixteen mice you took the two largest and bred them together. Their children would in turn be mated with those of the largest pair from another group of sixteen. And so on. Given time and material enough, and making it advantageous to the species to produce larger members, it would be easy to produce mice the size of lions."

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Jonas. "You ought to give up drinking. Your imagination gets gruesome."

"I see," said Witherwax, "like in a book I read once where they had rats so big they ate horses and wasps the size of dogs."

"I recall the volume," said Thott, sipping his Presidente. "It was *The Food of the Gods*, by H. G. Wells. I fear, however, that the method he describes was not that of genetics, and therefore had no scientific validity."

"But could you make things like that by selective breeding?" asked Witherwax.

"Certainly. You could produce house-flies the size of tigers."

Mrs. Jonas raised a hand. "Alvin, what an awful thought. I hope you don't ever try it."

"There need be no cause for apprehension, my dear. The square-cube law will forever protect us from such a visitation."

"Huh?" said Witherwax.

"The square-cube law. If you double the dimensions, you quadruple the area and octuple the masses. The result is — well, in a practical non-technical sense, a tiger-sized house fly would have legs too thin and wings too small to support his weight."

Mrs. Jonas said: "Alvin, that's impractical. How could it move?"

The Professor essayed another bow, which was even less successful than the first, since it was made from a sitting position. "Madame, the purpose of such an experiment would not be practical but demonstrative. A tiger-sized fly would be a mass of jelly that would have to be fed from a spoon." He raised a hand. "There is no reason why anyone should produce such a

monster, and since nature has no advantages to offer insects of large size, it will decline to produce them. I agree that the thought is repulsive; myself, I would prefer the alternative project of producing elephants the size of flies."

Witherwax beckoned to Mr. Cohan. "These are good. Do it again. But wouldn't your square-cube law get you in Dutch there, too?"

"By no means, sir. In the case of size-reduction, it works in your favor. The mass is divided by eight, but the muscles remain proportionately the same, capable of supporting a vastly greater weight. The legs and wings of a tiny elephant would not only support him, but give him the agility of a humming-bird. Consider the dwarf elephants of Sicily during the Pliocene —"

"Alvin," said Mrs. Jonas, "you're drunk. Otherwise you'd remember how to pronounce Pleistocene, and you wouldn't be talking about elephants' wings."

"Not at all, my dear. I should confidently expect such a species to develop flight by means of enlarged ears, like the Dumbo of the movies."

Mrs. Jonas giggled. "Still, I wouldn't want one the size of a house fly. It would be too small for a pet and would get into things. Let's make it the size of a kitten, like this." She held out her index fingers about five inches apart.

"Very well, my dear," said the Professor. "As soon as I can obtain a grant from the Carnegie Foundation the project will be undertaken."

"Yes, but," said Witherwax, "how would you feed an elephant like that? And could they be house-broken?"

"If you can house-break a man, an elephant ought to be easy," said Mrs. Jonas. "And you could feed them oats or hay. Much cleaner than keeping cans of dog-food around."

The Professor rubbed his chin. "Hmm," he said. "The rate of absorption of nourishment would vary directly as the intestinal area — which would vary as the square of the dimensions — I'm not sure of the results, but I'm afraid we'd have to provide more concentrated and less conventional food. I presume that we could feed our *Elephas pollostei*, as I propose to call him, on lump sugar. No, not *Elephas Pollostei*, *Elephas pollostratos*, the 'utmost littlest, tiniest elephant.' "

Mr. Cohan, who had been neglecting his only other customer to lean on the bar in their direction, spoke up: "Mr. Considine, that's the salesman, was telling me that the most concentrated food you can get is good malt whiskey."

"That's it!" The Professor slapped the table. "Not *Elephas pollostratos* but *Elephas frumenti*, the whiskey elephant, from what he lives on. We'll breed them for a diet of alcohol. High energy content."

"Oh, but that won't do," protested Mrs. Jonas. "Nobody would want a house pet that had to be fed on whiskey all the time. Especially with children around."

Said Witherwax: "Look, if you really want these animals, why don't you keep them some place where children aren't around and whiskey is — bars, for instance."

"Profound observation," said Professor Thott. "And speaking of rounds, Mr. Cohan, let us have another. We have horses as outdoor pets, cats as house pets, canaries as cage pets. Why not an animal especially designed and developed to be a bar pet. Speaking of which — that stuffed owl you keep for a pet, Mr. Cohan, is getting decidedly mangy."

"They would steal things like that," said Mrs. Jonas dreamily. "They would take things like owls' feathers and pretzel sticks and beer-mats to build their nests with, up in the dark corners somewhere near the ceiling."

The Professor bent a benignant gaze on her as Mr. Cohan set out the drinks. "My dear," he said, "either this discussion of the future *Elephas frumenti* or the actual *spiritus frumenti* is going to your head. When you become poetical —"

The brass-blonde had leaned back and was looking upward. "I'm not poetical. That thing right up there on top of the pillar is the nest of one of your bar-elephants."

"What thing up where?" said Thott.

"That thing up there, where it's so dark."

"I don't see nothing," said Mr. Cohan, "and if you don't mind my saying so, this is a clean bar, not a rat in the place."

"They wouldn't be quite tame, ever," said Mrs. Jonas, still looking upward, "and if they didn't feel they were fed enough, they'd come and take for themselves when the bartender wasn't looking."

"That does look funny," said Thott, pushing his chair back and beginning to climb on it.

"Don't Alvin," said Mrs. Jonas. "You'll break your neck."

"Stand by me, then, and let me put my hand on your shoulder."

"Hil!" said Witherwax, suddenly. "Who drank my drink?"

Mrs. Jonas lowered her eyes. "Didn't you?"

"I didn't even touch it. Mr. Cohan just put it down, didn't you?"

"I did that. But that would be a couple of minutes back, and maybe you could —"

"I could not. I definitely, positively did not drink — hey, you people, look at the table!"

"If I had my other glasses . . ." said Thott, swaying somewhat uncertainly as he peered upward into the shadows.

"Look at the table," repeated Witherwax, pointing.

The glass that had held his drink was empty. Thott's still held about half a cocktail. Mrs. Jonas' glass lay on its side, and from its lip about a thimbleful of Presidente cocktail had flowed pinkly into an irregular patch the size of a child's hand.

As the other two followed Witherwax's finger, they saw that from this patch a line of little liquid footprints led across the table to the far edge, where they ceased suddenly. They were circular, each about the size of a dime, with a small scalloped front edge, as if made by . . .

2. *The Gift of God*

"It makes a man sad to see something like that," said Mr. Gross, shaking his head. "In the first place a Martini is not the drink for an evening, and in the second, a woman that spends her time drinking solitary in bars is on the road to ruination. Who is she, Mr. Co-han?"

He motioned with his head toward one of the tables, occupied by a woman who might have been a well-preserved forty. In front of her was a double Martini from which she occasionally sipped, running her tongue around her lips after each sip, and staring into the glass as though it were ten feet deep. The bartender glanced, then placed both hands on the bar and leaned over.

"Mr. Gross," he said severely, "It will do you to know that I am the judge of how much people drink in Gavagan's, by God, and I keep it a decent place. Anybody that has to insult the customers can take his business somewhere else."

"I didn't mean nothing," said Mr. Gross, weakly. "I was just thinking of the woman's poor family."

"Family she has none, but ifshe had, they would not be poor nor ashamed of her neither. That there's Jocelyn Millard, that writes the religious poetry on the radio and all. Father McConaghy says it's as good as a sermon. She's been away for a while now, and this is the first I seen her back."

"The radio, eh?" said Mr. Gross, brightening as he turned to gaze at the poetess again. "Isn't that fine? My wife's cousin knows a man that won a set of dishes on the radio once, but he wasn't married then and had to give them away and the teapot got broke. I'd like to know someone on the radio; maybe with my voice I could get to be one of them announcers."

The object of their conversation approached the bar and pushed her glass across.

"Another," she said in a husky voice.

"Sure, sure," said Cohan. "Miss Millard, do you know Mr. Gross, here? The more people that meet each other, the better it is for all of them."

"Pleased to meet you, ma'am," said Gross. "I was just talking to Mr. Cohan about you being in the radio business."

"How do you do," said Miss Millard. "But I'm not in the radio business."

"Didn't I tell you?" said Mr. Cohan, stirring vigorously. "She only writes the poetry."

"Damn the poetry," said Miss Millard.

"Huh?" said Gross. "Is there something wrong with it, ma'am?"

"Nothing anyone can help."

"Don't say that, ma'am. I call to mind when we were having a party at home on a Saturday night once and the toilet broke down and began flooding the whole place out. You wouldn't think anybody could do anything with all the plumbers closed up, but it turned out that my wife's sister's boy-friend was studying to be a horse-doctor, and he just took off his coat and got to work."

Miss Millard sipped gloomily, then appeared to make up her mind with a snap.

All right, I'll tell you [she said], and you just see what you can do, or Mr. Cohan, either. If you have any sense, you'll run a mile from me. It's worse than being a leper, and I made all the trouble for myself, too.

You know the kind of poems I write? They come over the air on the DIT network at the evening hour, mostly, but I sell some of them to papers, too. Inspirational poems, all about God gimme this, and God gimme that. Maybe they're not the best poetry in the world, but they do sell, and people write me letters saying they're a help. Even preachers and priests sometimes, and there was one woman who said I'd kept her from committing suicide. If people like my poems and get something out of them that makes life pleasanter, why shouldn't I give them what they want? Why shouldn't I?

[Gross shrugged his shoulders to indicate that he was not disposed to argue the point.]

I don't know how it happened, or who did what to me, but now I'm afraid I'll have to go back to schoolteaching. If anyone will give me a job after they find out. You might start mixing me another one, Mr. Cohan, I'll be finished with this by the time you have it ready.

This all started a few weeks back, when I decided it was time for a vacation, so I packed up and got in my car and drove up into the real old French part of Quebec. Rotten roads they have, but the food isn't bad, and I picked up some nice antiques and everything was going the way it should until I got to a place called Pas d'Ange, up on the Benoit River. They have a famous shrine there, run by the Benedictine monks, in a chapel. You know those monks have a choir, too, a real good one.

Now I write poetry that is supposed to have religious aspects, and I try to behave like a good Christian to other people, but I don't usually go into a church from one year's end to another, and I don't suppose I would have gone into the one at Pas d'Ange except that I got there in the afternoon when it was too late to push on to the next town. I'd exhausted all my reading matter and there wasn't anything else in the place to see.

So I went to the chapel, and sat down in one of the pews. Outside it was a beautiful fall day without a breath of wind. The light came in through stained glass that was really beautiful for so small a place, and as I sat there, I had a wonderful feeling of peace and calm, perhaps the kind of feeling religion is supposed to give you. I sat there a long time, not thinking of anything — in words, that is. After a while, the light began to fade. I got up to go, and at the same time the feeling I spoke of left me, as though a charm had somehow been broken, and I had only the memory instead of the thing itself. I had just begun working with the back of my mind on my poem for

the next week, when at the chapel door I met a little priest, just coming in.

He spoke to me in French. I know the language fairly well, but that Canadian French has such a peculiar accent that it was hard to make out what he was saying. I finally made out that he was inviting me to stay for the evening service, with the choir. By this time I was getting hungry and the beginning of my next week's poem was nagging me, so I tried to refuse, but he looked so unhappy that I finally gave in and went back with him. As I did so, he said something I didn't quite catch; something about unexpected blessings, and then left me there.

The choir was all it was said to be, and with the monks chanting and the incense rising in the dusk, the feeling — sort of holy and reverent, if you know what I mean, as though I were lighter than air and could rise right up through the roof — the feeling partly came back, but only in flashes, because all the time I was worrying about my poem. I couldn't seem to get beyond the first two lines:

God give me a child, a tree, a flower;
God give me a bird for just one hour —

After the service was over I didn't see the little priest again, and for the next two weeks I was so busy seeing things and finding roads that the poem I hadn't written dropped out of my mind until I got back to town. Then the sight of the streets and stores I knew reminded me that I had a deadline to meet. I started trying to think it out while I was putting the car away, beginning with the same lines as before. As I was going up in the elevator the two lines reminded me of the scene in the chapel, and I had another flash of the same sense, almost ecstasy you would call it, that I had experienced sitting in the chapel.

The minute I opened the door of the apartment, I knew something was wrong. I heard a squall. I rushed into my living room, and there it was — a new-born baby squirming around on my carpet and yelling its head off. The rest of it was there, too — a young oak-tree that seemed to be growing right out of the floor, reaching to the ceiling; a freshly-cut rose lying on my desk and a yellow oriole in the branches of the tree.

Yes, make me another, Mr. Cohan. You people need to realize that it's one thing to spend years telling God how much you want a child, and quite another to find all of a sudden that you have one. In the first place, I'm not married; I never have been; and I had just been away on a long trip. I could

see a perfectly terrible scandal starting up as soon as it became known that I had come back with a baby. I suppose I ought to be strong-minded and pay no attention, but the people who buy my poems are church-and-home folks, and I have to think of that.

In the second place, the brat had to be taken care of. Excuse me, I suppose it's really a very, sweet, lovely baby, just the kind I've been writing about. But I don't know anything about the creatures; when my friends have them, I'm afraid to pick them up. I managed to get this one into my bed and began telephoning for a registered nurse to come and help me, meanwhile trying to figure out a story that would account for the baby. It seemed that all the nurses in town were busy, but I finally did get one. While I was about it, though, the oriole flew out the window and I noticed my clock. It was exactly one hour from the time when I had come in, and I remembered that was the time I had put in the poem.

When the nurse came it was worse than ever. I had to spend half the afternoon buying things for the baby — it wet my bed, incidentally — and I couldn't think of any better story than that the child was left on my doorstep. The nurse evidently didn't believe me; she probably thinks I kidnaped it somewhere, and says I'll have to register it. I finally got away, but the apartment is a shambles and Lord knows what I'm going to do now.

"When did this happen?" asked Gross in an awed voice.

"Today. Why do you think I'm here?"

Mr. Cohan, who had been talking with someone down at the end of the bar, interrupted. "Miss Millard, there's a fella here looking for you."

She turned around to face a man in dungarees and a hard hat.

"Plumber for the building at 415 Henry, Miss Millard. Sorry to come in here and bother you, but it seems like you got some kind of potted tree in your place, and it must have grown through the bottom of the tub, because the roots are breaking into the gas lines in the ceiling of the floor below, and I had to cut some of them off. They told me —"

Miss Millard gripped the edge of the bar. "God give me strength!"

Under her fingers the small section of wood crumbled as though it were tissue-paper and a shower of little dusty fragments drifted to the floor.

"Them damn termites!" said Mr. Cohan. "I told Gavagan about them a dozen times, and he just won't do nothing till the whole place falls down."

We begin 1950 — and this new department — with a brief survey of fantasy publishing in general and the best books of the last year in particular. If any statement of future reviewing policy is needed, it's simply this: we'll read everything and bring to your attention the best in our field.

Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

PUBLISHED OUTPUT of fantasy and/or science fiction for 1949 was, curiously enough, both extremely good and extremely bad. With one or two exceptions, there were at least three contenders for the top place in each category; each category also furnished an assortment of trash that had no earthly excuse for existence between covers. On the whole, though, the best was the best of a *good* lot; the competition in the field was the toughest since fantasy book publishing made its bow in the first years of the past decade.

A further good omen is the number of fantasy and science fiction books to receive an honored place on the lists of major publishers. These all had the editorial and promotional treatment accorded a potential secondary leader on the list; in other words, such publications are regarded as a sound investment.

It's not wishful thinking to predict that in 1950 the number of general publishers dipping their toes in the water will at least triple.

Now to the matter at hand. We have categorized only for convenience in classification; it should be obvious by now that we don't consider fantasy and science fiction irreconcilable aliens. By category, then, here are the nine best of 1949:

1: Fredric Brown: *WHAT MAD UNIVERSE* (Dutton)

Announced as the first of Dutton's science fiction list. There could be no happier beginning than this blend of humor, logic, terror and satire — by far the most successful of the several general publishers' offerings of science fiction for the average reader. Jack Williamson's *THE HUMANOID*S (Simon &

Schuster) places second only because an inconsistent ending all but ruins the wonderful suspense of the paraphysicals' struggle against the Humanoids.

2: S. Fowler Wright: THE WORLD BELOW (Shasta)

The year's most notable science fiction reissue, and high time, too. Proving that s-f adventure romance can also offer sociological criticism, spiritual stimulation and satire of high order. Hard on its heels comes the reissue (by Prime) of L. Sprague de Camp's *LEST DARKNESS FALL*, a witty version of the Connecticut Yankee theme, distinguished by its lore of Gothic Rome.

3: Theodore Sturgeon: WITHOUT SORCERY (Prime)

A striking volume of science fiction short stories (with a little of the supernatural thrown in) which combines ingenious concepts with humor, humanity and sheer good writing. Outstanding among other such volumes are Stanley G. Weinbaum's group of classics of alien life, *A MARTIAN ODYSSEY AND OTHERS* (Fantasy Press), and L. Sprague de Camp's wacky but cogently logical *THE WHEELS OF IF AND OTHER SCIENCE-FICTION* (Shasta).

**4: Everett F. Bleiler & T. E. Dikty, editors:
THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1949 (Fell)**

The finest of the year's science fiction anthologies, including distinguished stories by Leinster, Bradbury and Shiras, and nine others nearly as good. Other anthologies demanding inclusion in your library are August Derleth's *THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON* (Pellegrini & Cudahy) and Orson Welles' *INVASION FROM MARS* (Dell).

**5: Chesley Bonestell & Willy Ley:
THE CONQUEST OF SPACE (Viking)**

At once the most beautiful and most informative (and startlingly inexpensive) volume of factual material vital to the science fiction reader — who will also revel in the reasonably priced reissues of H. Spencer Jones' *LIFE ON OTHER WORLDS* (Mentor) and J. W. Dunne's key-volume on modern time theory, *AN EXPERIMENT WITH TIME* (Macmillan).

6: Louis Golding: HONEY FOR THE GHOST (Dial)

The year's only notable new supernatural novel, which begins with infinite

leisure but builds to an incomparable climactic terror of devil-worship and possession.

**7: James Hogg: THE PRIVATE MEMOIRS AND CONFESSIONS
OF A JUSTIFIED SINNER (Chanticleer)**

Re-issue of this forgotten classic by the eccentric protégé of Sir Walter Scott, originally published in 1824, is a major event of the publishing year. This terrifying picture of the devil's subtle conquest of a self-righteous man is a masterpiece of the supernatural.

8: Leon Edel, editor: THE GHOSTLY TALES OF HENRY JAMES (Rutgers)

Eighteen magnificently conceived and executed episodes, admirably edited, establish James as one of America's foremost, if most neglected, masters of fantasy. Other important volumes of shorts include Shirley Jackson's **THE LOTTERY** (Farrar, Straus), a brilliant collection of naturalistic glimpses of a world with terrifying holes in it, and Sir Andrew Caldecott's **FIRE BURN BLUE** (Longmans, Green), a quietly eery book in the M. R. James tradition.

9: James Reynolds: GALLERY OF GHOSTS (Creative Age)

A lavishly illustrated and sumptuously produced volume of non-fiction ghost stories, wise in its choice of unfamiliar ghosts who were interesting even before death. Readers who wish to probe past the fiction of magic to its supposed facts will welcome the re-issue of Arthur Edward Waite's able and argumentative translation of Eliphas Lévi's **THE HISTORY OF MAGIC** (Borden).



One of the most interesting — and pleasing — of recent trends in science-fiction writing has been the successful invasion by women of a one time male-dominated field. Well in the van of that conquering host is Margaret St. Clair, who tells us she has been "writing the stuff" for nearly ten years. Mrs. St. Clair has an especial gift for writing about nice, everyday people tangling with the complex — and not always nice — world of day after tomorrow. For instance, take a pleasant, ordinary young couple, send them off one night to the movies . . . and it all sounds like a humdrum happening of 1950. But life is subtly not humdrum for Mrs. St. Clair's people of the future. Not when the evening's entertainment offers events not listed on the program. Like a trip to the underwater world of Arlesia that begins as a new kind of travel film and develops into a very curious business concerning dreams. So plausible are Mrs. St. Clair's conjectures about what's to come that we, for one (or two), don't face the future with too much confidence.

World of Arlesia

by MARGARET ST. CLAIR

"THAT'S ODD," you said, looking up from the financial page. "It seems Lunar Mines is going to declare a dividend on its common stock this year after all. I heard keeping the workers in space suits all the time was running their production costs up too high, and there was supposed to be some engineering reason why they couldn't put the mines under a universal dome. But Lunar always had clever technicians. The article says they expect to cut a juicy melon at Christmas time." You folded the evening paper and looked at me. "Are we going anywhere tonight?"

"Oh, if we can find a good picture, something we haven't seen. . . . We've been to all the good ones, Bill."

"Let's see," you said, "something caught my eye in the inside pages. Here." You spread the paper open again and pointed.

There was a drawing of a woman's head, wide-eyed, flat-nosed, with subtly-smiling mouth, the filmy hair streaming out all around the head in a

circle, and little fishes darting in and out through the floating meshes. "World of Arlesia," I read, "in a double bill with Diabolique. The strangest pictures ever filmed. A unique visit to another world."

"World of Arlesia," I repeated reflectively. "I think I've heard of it. They used a special filming process, and there's some reproduction of tactile sensations and smells. It's new."

"I remember the name, too," you agreed. "It's about a radio operator on a motor ship. He keeps getting messages for which he can't account. It turns out that they're coming from the people of Arlesia, the underwater world. It was filmed by some small independent company."

The theatre was in a remote part of the city, a small building, not one of the usual picture houses. Inside, the seats spread out in a semi-circle around a low stage; the walls were pale cream and the draperies dull red, of heavy velvet. The audience was of fair size.

After an interval, a woman came out and stood before the velvet curtains. She was slender, tall, with a dead-white skin and very dark red hair. She wore a quiet, well-tailored suit. She was carrying a square black box.

"Good evening," she said, bowing politely toward the audience. "Tonight I will perform for you WORLD OF ARLESTIA."

She seated herself at a table to the left of the stage with the black box before her. At a slight movement of her hand, the curtain slid back from the stage and the house lights went out.

A slow play of colors began to move across the stage. After a little while the tempo accelerated; the colors grew more and more bright. They began to hurt my eyes, and I kept looking away. I noticed, Bill, that you were gazing with fixed attention at the screen, as if fascinated.

The movement on the screen reached a whirling climax and then started to slacken again. The colors dimmed and dulled; finally, with a last slow circling, they faded out. . . .

You and I were driving uphill. It was a sunny afternoon, the air pleasant and warm. We're really in the picture, I thought with dreamy satisfaction as we followed the winding road up, but it's very different from what I expected it would be.

At the top of the hill, you stopped the car and got out. I followed you. Together we walked down a brick path toward a house in the hollow.

A man came out toward us. He bowed slightly and smiled. "You're the

radio operator, I suppose," I said to him. Perhaps he would tell us about his adventures, or perhaps he would take us with him on the ship.

He raised his eyebrows slightly, as if in surprise. "No," he answered, "I'm your guide." He led us down into the garden. There was a shelf built against the side of the house, and on it were three underwater masks and simple respirators.

"Do you see that shimmering ahead?" he asked, pointing through the trees. "That's where the underwater world of Arlesia begins. You are to put on your masks and respirators, and we will go hunting fish."

I hesitated. "Oh, it's perfectly safe," the guide urged. "Overhead there are tons and tons of water, of course, but the masks are of special design. See, your husband has already put his on." I looked toward you and saw you, faintly grotesque in your new accouterment, listening eagerly to what the guide said.

When I had put on my mask, he handed us each a slender spear. "We catch the fish with these," he said. "Come on." He led us forward.

The water seemed to thicken about our limbs, and we moved more slowly as we advanced. Ahead, there were opalescent swirlings in the sunny water, vagrant rainbow plays of color that might have been the motions of schools of fish. We toiled painfully after them over the level ocean floor.

You were excited. Through the thick glass of your mask I could see you smile, and once you turned to me in triumph, saying, "See the one I caught then!" and held out your bare spear for me to see.

I soon tired of the fruitless sport. I stood watching you and the guide flounder after the elusive water-whirls, feeling myself divided between dreamy acceptance of everything and a faint uneasiness which might even grow into fright.

"That's enough," the guide said at last. "Now we'll go on in." He led us through the darkening waters along a narrow path that ran between lumps of what might have been coral. A greenish building loomed up ahead.

"Excuse me," the guide said. "I want to speak to the people inside." He opened a door and called out something to the women who were standing within in the greenish dusk or moving dully at some unknown task. None of them wore respirators or masks.

Then . . . "This isn't underwater," I said, facing the guide. "There aren't tons of water overhead. If there were, you couldn't have opened the

door just now; those people would have drowned. And we couldn't talk to each other underwater without a radio. I don't like it here."

"Oh, yes, yes, it is underwater," the guide replied quickly, urgently. "It's all underwater, everything. What gives you such a strange idea? This is Arlesia, the underwater world." He pointed upward, to where the light was coming down thickened, as through layers of greenish gauze. "See how the light is, filtered through those fathoms and fathoms of water above us? Now do you believe this is what I say it is?"

I looked down at my hands, my feet. I wasn't even wet. "No," I replied.

"I'll have one of the women finish showing you about," the guide said with agitated haste. "As soon as you've seen more, you'll be convinced." He motioned to one of the women in the room and she came drifting up to us, her face a dim, brownish oval. "Take her on in," he bade her. "See that she sees enough. Be sure."

The woman put her hand on my wrist and began to draw me into a corridor. "Where's my husband?" I asked, looking back.

"He's being taken on in," she replied in a monotone. "He's all right. Don't worry. He's perfectly all right."

We moved down a long dim passage toward a heavy door. "Come in here," she said. "After you've been in here, you'll understand things better. It won't be any trouble for you to believe." She pushed the door open with her shoulder and tried to draw me inside.

I pulled back. I had caught a glimpse of complicated machines, of a huge screen on which coruscated just such dazzling colors as those I had already seen in the theatre. An inhuman gobbling and whirring came from the room.

"I won't," I said. "You're trying to do something to me, something to my mind. I won't go in there."

"Ah, well," she said. She dropped my wrist and was silent. She looked at me with a vague half-smile. "You get tired of living underwater all the time," she said in a tone of tremulous confiding.

She clasped her long fingers around my wrist once more. I followed her reluctantly. Was *this* the picture, World of Arlesia? Wasn't the pretence, rather, that I was in some fantastic place designed to hide from me the fact that this was *real*, that something real and *bad* was going on?

"You ought to've gone in that room," my guide said, turning to me in faint reproach. "You'd've understood everything better then. But see."

She held open another door for me to look within. Under a flickering bluish-green light, with the sharp smell of ozone in the air, I saw naked women lying on couches, row after row of them, tier after tier. There seemed to be some sort of electrical terminals at their heads and at their feet. In the difficult light I fixed my eyes on the face of one nearest me; her face was tense and contorted, deathly white, and blood trickled slowly from her lips.

"What are you doing to them?" I cried. "She's being hurt! What are you doing?"

"Why, they're having the most beautiful dreams," the woman said, wearing a faint smile. She lowered her voice. "I heard them talking about it once. They said something about transmitting them, or something like that."

Still leading me by the wrist, she took me through the long rooms into another of only slightly smaller size. Stacked up in layers against its sides were what I at first took to be brocaded rolls of silk. Then I saw that they were the swaddled bodies of women, shrunken and dry.

"What has happened to them?" I demanded, shrinking back and pointing at the piles. "Are they dead? They look dried up, as if all the blood has been sucked out of them."

"Oh, no, of course not. They're learning to be mermaids, dear."

"To be mermaids? That's ridiculous." I felt faint.

The woman came close to me, her eyeballs swiveling from side to side as she looked agitatedly around the room. She put her face close to my ear. "Once I heard a leader say," she breathed, her voice a mere shred of sound, "that they had been transmitted to the moon. To work in the mines. They don't need air or food. They're part on the moon and part here."

"On the moon? What—"

"Hush, hush! They're learning to be mermaids, dear. That's the way it really is."

She led me on through the room and out into another corridor. We stopped at a little door near an ascending stair.

"Go in there and take off your things, dear," she bade me. "All of them. Then we'll go back." She gave me a little push and a dim smile.

I clutched the door jamb. "I won't," I said. "I won't go in there. I want my husband back. I want out of here." I began to cry.

"But you've got to!" She pulled at my wrist, using an unsuspected

strength. She was speaking from between clenched teeth. "You've just got to! You can't act like this!"

I tried to pull away. Then I saw a woman hurrying down the stair toward us. She looked brisk and wide-awake; she almost seemed normal. It seemed to me she was some sort of a matron or wardress. Diamonds glittered at her ears, her neck, her plump wrists.

"What's all this, Xenia?" she snapped. "What are you doing? Using force? I won't have that, it's too dangerous."

"She won't take her things off," the other woman whined. "She doesn't want to — to start dreaming."

"Won't take her things off?" She was close to me, frowning. "Then how did she get in as far as this?"

I was sick with fright. But I tried not to show it, to stop crying.

"I want out of here," I said. "I want my husband back. Now!"

"But, child, that's impossible." Her voice was reasonable, kind, even, but her eyes glittered with a colder fire than did her diamonds. "You must see that. You can't be processed if you're unwilling. And if you stay here, you might raise the sleepers. And that would start something it would be hard to stop."

"You could exhaust her," Xenia said eagerly. "She wouldn't have to be willing . . . for that."

I felt the stout woman's plump hand under my chin, saw her cold eyes boring into mine.

"Perhaps. Hmmn." She shook her head. "No. Not this type. She would be of no use to us whatever. And what would we do with the body?"

I tried to keep the eagerness and the terror out of my voice. "You could let me go. It's not impossible. Don't you see, no one would believe that this was anything except the movie, World of Arlesia? All this is in the picture, isn't it? I saw what I was meant to see — the radio operator's adventures — the fish-hunting."

It was no use. The stout woman shook her head.

"You're clever, girl," she said. "You would be, of course. And you've seen too much. Very much too much. We can't have you free, to give away trade secrets."

"Then you'll have to kill me," I cried. "I — I won't give in — I won't let you do — whatever you want to do to me!"

"You'll suffer for this, Xenia!" The stout woman's arm shot out, pulling Xenia violently toward her. She shook her so hard I thought Xenia's spine would crack. "You'll have no more of — of what you *need!* I'll take it away from you. Forever! Forever, do you hear?"

The listless Xenia was suddenly filled with energy. She pulled herself free and her face contorted with desperate anger.

"Then I'll tell them about her. I'll tell the one who always hurts. You'll get yours, then. The penalty for mis-management."

The stout woman bit her lip savagely. "All right, then! Let her go. Take her out, all the way! I will settle with you, later."

My knees began to shake, then, and I wanted to run. Xenia's dusky hands were pushing me out, away from there, but I wouldn't go.

"I won't go without my husband. I want him back!"

"Hush!" the stout woman almost screamed. Her face was murderous. "You'll get him. Take him out, too, Xenia. Hurry, now, before — before they find out!"

We were sitting in the theater again. Everyone else had gone; the building was chilly, and only a few dim lights burned. You yawned and stretched.

"I certainly got cramped sitting still so long," you said. "But the picture was interesting, didn't you think?"

"Yes," I replied.

"It was all so real. I like that part about catching the fish — remember all those big fish I caught, twenty or so, all colors, and some even with stripes?"

"Yes, that was fun."

"And all those mermaids, swimming around? When the guide went into the cave to talk to them? That was really beautiful."

"Yes, I liked that."

"It was quite a picture," you said. "But I thought the ending was too abrupt. They were just about to turn me into a merman, with gills and everything, so I could enjoy being in Arlesia without having to wear a mask and respirator, and then it just stopped. Didn't you think the ending was a little too abrupt, Marie? It would have been more artistic to have us become underwater people like the others in Arlesia."

"Oh, I don't know," I replied. My voice was a trifle unsteady, but I don't think you noticed it. "I'm just as glad it ended when it did, I think."

While seeking treasure trove on a bookseller's ten cent table, we picked up a book bound in faded rose cloth wholly with the uninstructive title of VAN WAGENER'S WAYS, by W. L. Alden (Pearson, London 1898). The frontispiece pictured, in pen and ink, a presumably authentic likeness of Mr. Alden, showing him as a grave, almost grim person in awesome sideburns. Hardly a good come-on for hunters of lost fantasy and/or science-fiction! But a few pages convinced us that that sober gentleman was a master of that most difficult technique, the writing of comic science-fiction! For Mr. Alden was the creator of that maddest of all mad scientists, Professor Van Wagener, and of the Professor's incomparable Watson, the gentleman who is always referred to simply as the Colonel. Professor Van Wagener's experiments, either with electricity (whose properties were as ill-defined in the Nineties as are those of atomic energy today), or with explosives, or, as in the present case, with the management of volcanoes, are always magnificent in concept and — well, unfortunate in execution. They are related with tolerant understanding, dry humor and a certain sneaking respect by that excellent man of business, the Colonel — who deserves more than that anonymity allotted him by Mr. Alden. For more of the Professor's exploits, read TOLD BY THE COLONEL or look up Mr. Alden's stories in "The Idler" of the years 1892 through 1896. Those were the halcyon days when that magazine was edited by those twin masters of fantasy, Robert Barr and Jerome K. Jerome!

The Volcanic Valve

by W. L. ALDEN

"I ALWAYS WANTED Van Wagener," said the Colonel, "to visit Europe, and hob-nob with your scientific folks. But he wouldn't do it. He said that nobody in Europe wanted to see him, and that he didn't calculate to force himself on other people. I had supposed that this was nothing more than the Professor's natural shyness, but I accidentally found out that he had once written to Queen Victoria, telling her that he had an invention that would be just the thing for making sure that no enemy would land in England.

"He asked the Queen to drop him a line saying what day he could call on her and talk the matter over, but the Queen never answered his letter, and that made Van Wagener feel that he wasn't wanted in England.

"However, the Professor did make one voyage to Europe — that is to say, to the Mediterranean. He and I were both invited to go round the world in Major Ephraim D. Scroggins's yacht, and we both accepted the invitation. We sailed direct to Naples, and spent considerable time there. The yacht was a big, comfortable steamer, but Major Scroggins was always more or less sea-sick while he was on board of her. To tell the truth, he hated yachting as he hated losing money, but being an American millionaire he wouldn't have been thoroughly respected unless he had done a little travelling in a yacht of his own. It's the same with all our millionaires. Any one of them would rather go to bed with the typhoid fever for a month than go on a yachting cruise, but public sentiment is too strong for them, and they have to go yachting, and to pretend that they like it. Major Scroggins didn't like Naples very much, believing as he did that Chicago was fifty times superior to it; but there was something in the smells that he struck in the narrow streets that seemed sort of homelike, and then he reflected the longer he stopped at the hotel in Naples, the less time he would have to spend on board the yacht.

"As for Van Wagener, he was delighted with Naples, principally on account of the volcano. He was up and down Vesuvius almost every day, and was nearly choked to death half-a-dozen times through trying to climb down into the crater. One day he came to the hotel where the Major was stopping, and where I happened to be taking a cocktail with him, and said in an excited sort of way: 'Gentlemen! I've got the biggest idea that I've struck yet, and if you'll furnish the capital we'll carry it out, and make ourselves famous for ever.'

"'I'm about as famous as I want to be,' said the Major, 'but if you've got anything to say, go ahead and say it.'

"'You admit,' says Van Wagener, 'that Vesuvius is the attraction that brings most people to Naples. They come here to see an eruption, and in nine cases out of ten the mountain don't erupt. Now if you and I owned that mountain, and could turn on an eruption whenever we pleased, we should have the biggest show on earth. We could make a uniform charge of a thousand dollars an eruption, and the municipality would pay it cheer-

fully, for they would get back their money ten times over out of the visitors that would come to Naples to see a genuine eruption. If ten thousand visitors come here every winter, knowing that their chance of seeing an eruption is about one in a hundred, how many do you think would come if they could be absolutely sure of an eruption every night, except Sundays, at nine o'clock to the minute? Why, sir! Vesuvius properly managed would draw at least half a million people every season, and if they were taxed a dollar a head, there would be half a million dollars to be shared by the municipality and the owners of the show.'

"That's all right enough," said I, "but I don't see how you are going to manage the mountain, and make it erupt or not erupt just as you please."

"I've thought it all out," said the Professor, "and the thing is as easy as rolling off a log. What is it makes a volcano erupt? It's steam, sir! Steam! You look down the crater of a volcano that isn't erupting, and you'll see that the bottom is covered with a thick crust of hardened lava. That crust stays there, and keeps the mountain from erupting until she gets too big a head of steam on. When that happens the steam blows out the crust of lava, and then there is an eruption until the pressure is reduced. A volcano is nothing more or less than a big boiler without a safety valve, or any sort of an escape pipe. It's bound to burst at irregular intervals. Now if you provide a volcano with a safety valve, so that you can regulate the pressure, you can have an eruption whenever you please, or you can prevent any eruption from taking place."

"Your reasoning may be all right," said I, "but I don't see how you are going to fit a safety valve to Vesuvius."

"When Vesuvius is quiet," said Van Wagener, "that crust that I spoke of is about a hundred feet from the top of the cone. I know this because I have read everything that has ever been written by any scientific observer concerning the mountain. Now, if you drive a gallery straight into the mountain at the foot of the cone, you will strike what an engineer would call the steam chest, at about five or six hundred feet below the crust. You make this gallery, say, six feet in diameter, and as long as it is open the steam will rush out and keep the mountain from erupting. That's my plan for keeping the mountain quiet when I don't want an eruption."

"And how are you going to manage your eruptions?" I asked.

"That's another easy question," said he. "In order to make steam you

require water, don't you? Well, I intend to have a big pumping engine that will throw a stream of water twenty-four inches in diameter into that gallery. When this water strikes the melted lava in the inside of the mountain it will be converted into steam, and as soon as the pressure gets up to the necessary point there will be an eruption. A few experiments will show just how much water will be required to produce a first-class eruption. When we know that, we will know just what time of day to begin pumping in order to have an eruption at nine o'clock p.m.'

"What Van Wagener said interested me. I knew he was one of the best scientific men living, and besides knowing all general science, he knew all there was to know about steam engines. I began to think there might be something in his scheme, and as I hadn't been doing anything except trying to amuse myself for more than six weeks, I was feeling pretty low spirited and knew that I needed to engage in some good speculation if I wanted to feel like myself once more. The Major felt the same way, and after thinking the thing over for a few minutes, he said: 'I suppose we could buy Vesuvius for a song.'

"'We don't need to buy anything but the cone,' replied the Professor; 'but I'll undertake to buy the whole mountain for a thousand dollars. By a rough calculation it will cost about ten thousand dollars to set up the proper machinery and bore the gallery. After that is done our expenses won't be worth mentioning. Besides, I have an idea that we can utilize the heat of the mountain and supply it to Naples in pipes. Naples could warm itself and do all its cooking with the heat that we would furnish, and you can see for yourself that there would be the biggest kind of a fortune to be got out of this single feature of my scheme.'

"Well, we talked about putting a safety valve into Vesuvius and going into business as the 'Vesuvius Exhibition and Heat Supplying Company,' for the next week, Van Wagener getting more and more enthusiastic about it, and the Major and I gradually making up our minds to give the thing a trial. I was ready to go shares with the Major in furnishing the capital, but I saw perfectly well that it wouldn't do to go into the thing without experimenting first, and I knew that we couldn't conduct any experiments on Vesuvius without letting the public into the secret. Either we would make a failure and be laughed at, or we would succeed, in which case somebody would buy up Etna and start an opposition show that would be twice as big

as ours, for Vesuvius isn't to be named in the same day with Etna. Finally, I thought of a way out of the difficulty, and I proposed it to Van Wagener.

"'You find,' said I, 'some big volcano situated in a place where there is nobody to watch our proceedings, except perhaps a lot of savages, and the Major and I will furnish the capital necessary for putting a safety valve into that volcano. If the experiment succeeds, then we'll come back to the Mediterranean, and buy up every volcano, active or extinct, that we can hear of.'

"I know the very volcano we want," said the Professor; "it's called Krakatoa, and it stands all alone on an island somewhere near Java or Sumatra. If there's anybody on the island they'll be naked savages, and it won't matter what they think of our proceedings. Let's lay in a compressed-air boring machine and a pumping-engine and start for Krakatoa as soon as possible."

"We lay in the Bay of Naples about two months longer, waiting for our machinery, which we couldn't get short of England. Van Wagener was so full of his scheme that he gradually got me to believe in it almost as thoroughly as he did himself. If our experiments should turn out to be successful, and we could get the monopoly of all the volcanoes in Europe, there would be hardly any end to the things we could do. We could furnish heat and energy to every town in Europe, and could knock the coal-mining business higher than a kite. I had lost a little money in coal mines myself, and I rather liked the idea of freezing out the coal market. Of course, I didn't grudge the loss of the money, for a business man is bound to have his losses as well as his profits, and then again I knew that the British and French coal mines were not responsible for my losses in Pennsylvania mines. Still, we're only human after all, and I dare say that we all know what it is to want to get square with people when they get the better of us in trade.

"Well, the machinery arrived, and after a good deal of trouble on the part of the Major's chief engineer, who didn't understand what the machinery was wanted for, and was inclined to think that we were taking a liberty in putting any sort of machinery aboard the yacht without first consulting him, we got it stowed away. When we were ready to sail the sailing-master was ordered to take the yacht to Batavia, where we expected to get some information as to the whereabouts of Krakatoa, for it wasn't laid down on any chart, and all the sailing-master knew about it was that it was a vol-

cano and was situated somewhere within about five hundred miles of Java.

"Well, we got to Batavia in due time, and if you'll take my advice you'll never go there. It's just a Turkish bath, with fever and Dutchmen thrown in, and soap and shampooing left out. We found out the latitude and longitude of Krakatoa, and laid in thirty-eight Chinese coolies, and were thankful to get away from Batavia with our lives.

"We made Krakatoa the third day after leaving Batavia. It was a tremendous big mountain, about five or six times as high as Vesuvius, and was situated on an island that, as far as we could see, was uninhabited, though I don't say that there might not have been people living on the north side of the island, for we didn't take the trouble to circumnavigate it.

"We didn't waste any time in getting the machinery ashore and setting it up, but the job took the best part of a week, for the reason that everything had to be carried ashore on the coolies' heads.

"According to Van Wagener's calculations his gallery would have to be about seven hundred feet long, in order to reach the centre of the cone. You see we didn't start it at the foot of the volcano, but about half way up the cone, at a place where there was a sort of terrace that gave us room for setting up the machinery. The gallery was six feet in diameter, and the boring machine had no difficulty in cutting through the consolidated ashes and soft rock that formed the greater part of the mountain. We all lived aboard the yacht, and the coolies lived ashore in tents. We worked twelve hours a day, for the Chinamen hadn't heard of the Eight Hour law, and their head man, who carried a big whip, kept them from being exhausted by the heat.

"The gallery sloped downward at an angle of about twenty-five degrees, so that when we should come to pumping water into it, the water would run down easily into the interior of the volcano. In about a month we had the gallery nearly finished, and Van Wagener calculated that with two days' more labour we could break through into the interior of the cone.

"We had gone on board the yacht for dinner, leaving the coolies at work, and were congratulating ourselves that the job was so nearly completed, when there was the noise of a tremendous explosion, followed by a rush of steam out of the mouth of the gallery. The steam hid everything from sight for a distance of, say, three hundred yards from the mouth of the gallery, but beyond that we could see the machinery and thirty-eight coolies sailing through the air at about the speed of a cannonball.

"At the rate they were going Van Wagener calculated that they would fetch up beyond the reach of the earth's attraction, and would keep on sailing through the universe like so many comets. I don't know whether he was right or not, but I never heard that the least particle of either machinery or coolies ever struck the earth again. We only had a glimpse of them for a second or two, and then they went out of sight.

"The steam continued to rush out of Van Wagener's safety valve without diminishing in quantity or force. If you were to get together all the steamers in the world, and set them all to blowing off steam at the same moment, and then multiply the roaring of the steam a hundred times, you'd begin to have some idea of the noise that Krakatoa made blowing off steam through the Professor's safety valve. On board the yacht we could only talk by signs, and we finally gave even that up, for the noise was so great that you couldn't even think. This lasted till one o'clock in the morning, when there came a crash that was louder than anything that was ever heard on this earth, before or since. It was a mercy that it didn't deafen every man of us for good and all. I have been told that it was heard a distance of fully a thousand miles, and I don't doubt it.

"What had happened was that Krakatoa had burst its boiler. You may perhaps know that if you have a heavy pressure of steam on a boiler, and you let the water get too low, the most dangerous thing you can do is to blow off steam. The moment that you reduce the pressure on the surface of the water the whole of it flashes into steam, and your boiler is blown into smithereens. Now Krakatoa had a good head of steam on, and her water must have been pretty low, for after she had blown off for five or six hours the pressure was so far reduced that all the water remaining in her rushed into steam and produced the biggest explosion on record. The upper half of the mountain was blown clean away, and the air was filled with stones and lava and ashes and hot water. Inside of five minutes the moon and the stars went out and it was as black as midnight in Egypt in the time of old Pharaoh. In next to no time our deck was covered six inches deep with ashes and stones, and the sea was boiling worse than it does in the centre of a cyclone.

"The sailing-master slipped his cable, and started up the engine just as quick as he could do it, and then we steamed away as fast as we could drive her towards the North. The channel wasn't an easy one in the daylight, and

the sailing-master didn't even pretend that he could navigate it in the pitchy darkness. However, we were certain to lose the yacht and our lives if we stayed at our anchorage, and we couldn't do more than that by trying to run away. So we just took our chances, knowing at the time that they were mighty slim.

"There never was such luck as we had that night, for we never once touched the bottom, though as we afterwards knew old islands were sinking, and new ones were being thrown up all around us. After the eruption was over, ships that passed that way found dry land in places where there had been a thousand fathoms of water, and sailed directly over places where there had been dry land and mountains. It was nearly ten o'clock the next day before we ran clear of the ashes, and came into open daylight. Then we found out where we were, and put the yacht on a course for Singapore.

"That is the way that the great eruption of Krakatoa was brought about, and what I should like to know is whether Van Wagener and Major Scroggins and I were responsible for the thirty thousand or so heathens that are said to have been killed by it. Of course we never meant to hurt a living soul.

"Still, the thought that I had a hand in killing all those heathens disturbs me at times. It never disturbed the Major, for the only thing that could ever disturb him would be a heavy fall in the stock market after he had bought for a rise. And as for Van Wagener, though he was one of the best and kindest of men, he always said that human life was nothing in comparison with science, and he didn't think the lives of thirty thousand heathens worth mentioning, considering that we proved that a safety valve could be put into a volcano. However, he never had an opportunity for repeating his experiment, for the Major was so badly scared at the risk he had run of wrecking the yacht that he couldn't be induced to sail within a thousand miles of another volcano, and he wouldn't listen to any more proposals for regulating eruptions.

"We sailed straight from Singapore to San Francisco, where the yacht was sold, and we all came home by rail. Van Wagener never ceased to regret that we hadn't carried out our scheme of buying up Vesuvius, and he always said that some of these days some other scientific man would put a safety valve in some leading volcano, and reap the fame that by fair rights ought to belong to those who blew up Krakatoa."

The Last Man on Earth is one of the classic themes of science fiction, from Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *THE LAST MAN* through M. P. Shiel's *THE PURPLE CLOUD* to the striking modern resolution of the situation in Alfred Bester's short story *Adam and No Eve*. The very grandeur of the theme has always evoked a certain solemnity of treatment; it took a fellow-editor, Damon Knight — weary perhaps of reading grandiose manuscripts — to see that the petty stupidity of man and his mores might mean that his world would end, in the words of T. S. Eliot, "not with a bang but a whimper." The result is a new kind of catastrophe — the cosmic cocktail mixed with a full jigger of wry.

Not With a Bang

by DAMON KNIGHT

TEN MONTHS after the last plane passed over, Rolf Smith knew beyond doubt that only one other human being had survived. Her name was Louise Oliver, and he was sitting opposite her in a department-store cafe in Salt Lake City. They were eating canned Vienna sausages and drinking coffee.

Sunlight struck through a broken pane, lying like a judgment on the cloudy air of the room. Inside and outside, there was no sound; only a stifling rumor of absence. The clatter of dishware in the kitchen, the heavy rumble of streetcars: never again. There was sunlight; and silence; and the watery, astonished eyes of Louise Oliver.

He leaned forward, trying to capture the attention of those fishlike eyes for a second. "Darling," he said, "I respect your views, naturally. But I've got to make you see that they're impractical."

She looked at him with faint surprise, then away again. Her head shook slightly: No. No, *Rolf*. *I will not live with you in sin*.

Smith thought of the women of France, of Russia, of Mexico, of the South Seas. He had spent three months in the ruined studios of a radio station in Rochester, listening to the voices until they stopped. There had been a large colony in Sweden, including an English cabinet minister. They

reported that Europe was gone. Simply gone; there was not an acre that had not been swept clean by radioactive dust. They had two planes and enough fuel to take them anywhere on the Continent; but there was nowhere to go. Three of them had the plague; then eleven; then all.

There was a bomber pilot who had fallen near a government radio in Palestine. He did not last long, because he had broken some bones in the crash; but he had seen the vacant waters where the Pacific Islands should have been. It was his guess that the Arctic ice-fields had been bombed. He did not know whether that had been a mistake or not.

There were no reports from Washington, from New York, from London, Paris, Moscow, Chungking, Sydney. You could not tell who had been destroyed by disease, who by the dust, who by bombs.

Smith himself had been a laboratory assistant in a team that was trying to find an antibiotic for the plague. His superiors had found one that worked sometimes, but it was a little too late. When he left, Smith took along with him all there was of it — forty ampoules, enough to last him for years.

Louise had been a nurse in a genteel hospital near Denver. According to her, something rather odd had happened to the hospital as she was approaching it the morning of the attack. She was quite calm when she said this, but a vague look came into her eyes and her shattered expression seemed to slip a little more. Smith did not press her for an explanation.

Like himself, she had found a radio station which still functioned, and when Smith discovered that she had not contracted the plague, he agreed to meet her. She was, apparently, naturally immune. There must have been others, a few at least; but the bombs and the dust had not spared them.

It seemed very awkward to Louise that not one Protestant minister was left alive.

The trouble was, she really meant it. It had taken Smith a long time to believe it, but it was true. She would not sleep in the same hotel with him, either; she expected, and received, the utmost courtesy and decorum. Smith had learned his lesson. He walked on the outside of the rubble-heaped sidewalks; he opened doors for her, when there were still doors; he held her chair; he refrained from swearing. He courted her.

Louise was forty or thereabouts, at least five years older than Smith. He often wondered how old she thought she was. The shock of seeing whatever

it was that had happened to the hospital, the patients she had cared for, had sent her mind scuttling back to her childhood. She tacitly admitted that everyone else in the world was dead, but she seemed to regard it as something one did not mention.

A hundred times in the last three weeks, Smith had felt an almost irresistible impulse to break her thin neck and go his own way. But there was no help for it; she was the only woman in the world, and he needed her. If she died, or left him, he died. *Old bitch!* he thought to himself furiously, and carefully kept the thought from showing on his face.

"Louise, honey," he told her gently, "I want to spare your feelings as much as I can. You know that."

"Yes, Rolf," she said, staring at him with the face of a hypnotized chicken.

Smith forced himself to go on. "We've got to face the facts, unpleasant as they may be. Honey, we're the only man and the only woman there are. We're like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden."

Louise's face took on a slightly disgusted expression. She was obviously thinking of fig-leaves.

"Think of the generations unborn," Smith told her, with a tremor in his voice. *Think about me for once. Maybe you're good for another ten years, maybe not.* Shuddering, he thought of the second stage of the disease — the helpless rigidity, striking without warning. He'd had one such attack already, and Louise had helped him out of it. Without her, he would have stayed like that till he died, the hypodermic that would save him within inches of his rigid hand. He thought desperately, *If I'm lucky, I'll get at least two kids out of you before you croak. Then I'll be safe.*

He went on, "God didn't mean for the human race to end like this. He spared us, you and me, to —" He paused; how could he say it without offending her? "Parents" wouldn't do — too suggestive. "— to carry on the torch of life," he ended. There. That was sticky enough.

Louise was staring vaguely over his shoulder. Her eyelids blinked regularly, and her mouth made little rabbit-like motions in the same rhythm.

Smith looked down at his wasted thighs under the tabletop. *I'm not strong enough to force her,* he thought. *Christ, if I were strong enough!*

He felt the futile rage again, and stifled it. He had to keep his head, because this might be his last chance. Louise had been talking lately, in the cloudy language she used about everything, of going up in the mountains

to pray for guidance. She had not said, "alone," but it was easy enough to see that she pictured it that way. He had to argue her around before her resolve stiffened. He concentrated furiously, and tried once more.

The pattern of words went by like a distant rumbling. Louise heard a phrase here and there; each of them fathered chains of thought, binding her reverie tighter. "Our duty to humanity . . ." Mama had often said — that was in the old house on Waterbury Street of course, before Mama had taken sick — she had said, "Child, your duty is to be clean, polite, and God-fearing. Pretty doesn't matter. There's a plenty of plain women that have got themselves good, Christian husbands."

Husbands . . . To have and to hold . . . Orange blossoms, and the bridesmaids; the organ music. Through the haze, she saw Rolf's lean, wolfish face. Of course, he was the only one she'd ever get; *she* knew that well enough. Gracious, when a girl was past twenty-five, she had to take what she could get.

But I sometimes wonder if he's really a nice man, she thought.

" . . . in the eyes of God . . ." She remembered the stained-glass windows in the old First Episcopalian Church, and how she always thought God was looking down at her through that brilliant transparency. Perhaps He was still looking at her, though it seemed sometimes that He had forgotten. Well, of course she realized that marriage customs changed, and if you couldn't have a regular minister. . . . But it was really a shame, an outrage almost, that if she were actually going to marry this man, she couldn't have all those nice things . . . There wouldn't even be any wedding presents. Not even that. But of course Rolf would give her anything she wanted. She saw his face again, noticed the narrow black eyes staring at her with ferocious purpose, the thin mouth that jerked in a slow, regular tic, the hairy lobes of the ears below the tangle of black hair.

He oughtn't to let his hair grow so long, she thought, *it isn't quite decent*. Well, she could change all that. If she did marry him, she'd certainly make him change his ways. It was no more than her duty.

He was talking now about a farm he'd seen outside town — a good big house and a barn. There was no stock, he said, but they could get some later. And they'd plant things, and have their own food to eat, not go to restaurants all the time.

She felt a touch on her hand, lying pale before her on the table. Rolf's brown, stubby fingers, black-haired above and below the knuckles, were touching hers. He had stopped talking for a moment, but now he was speaking again, still more urgently. She drew her hand away.

He was saying, ". . . and you'll have the finest wedding dress you ever saw, with a bouquet. Everything you want, Louise, everything . . ."

A wedding dress! And flowers, even if there couldn't be any minister! Well, why hadn't the fool said so before?

Rolf stopped halfway through a sentence, aware that Louise had said quite clearly, "Yes, Rolf, I will marry you if you wish."

Stunned, he wanted her to repeat it, but dared not ask, "What did you say?" for fear of getting some fantastic answer, or none at all. He breathed deeply. He said, "Today, Louise?"

She said, "Well, *today* . . . I don't know quite . . . Of course, if you think you can make all the arrangements in time, but it does seem . . ."

Triumph surged through Smith's body. He had the advantage now, and he'd ride it. "Say you will, dear," he urged her; "say yes, and make me the happiest man . . ."

Even then, his tongue balked at the rest of it; but it didn't matter. She nodded submissively. "Whatever you think best, Rolf."

He rose, and she allowed him to kiss her pale, sapless cheek. "We'll leave right away," he said. "If you'll excuse me for just a minute, dear?"

He waited for her "Of course" and then left her, making footprints in the furred carpet of dust down toward the end of the room. Just a few more hours he'd have to speak to her like that, and then, in her eyes, she'd be committed to him forever. Afterwards, he could do with her as he liked—beat her when he pleased, submit her to any proof of his scorn and revulsion, use her. Then it would not be too bad, being the last man on Earth—not bad at all. She might even have a daughter . . .

He found the washroom door and entered. He took a step inside, and froze, balanced by a trick of motion, upright but helpless. Panic struck at his throat as he tried to turn his head and failed; tried to scream, and failed. Behind him, he was aware of a tiny click as the door, cushioned by the hydraulic check, shut forever. It was not locked; but its other side bore the warning: MEN.



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